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A GRADED COURSE OF STUDY FOR THE SUNDAY SCHOOL

STORIES FROM THE OLD TESTAMENT

Parker, Curr. Hathaway S-e-so.

BY

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PREFACE.

The stories in this book are those which were told and retold by the Hebrew people a long time ago, and are found in that part of the Bible called the Old Testament.

It is good for us to know what they in that far-off time thought about the things which we still think about and wonder over,—the earth, the people and creatures upon it, and the God who made it. We must keep in mind the fact that we are not reading histories, but stories which give us thoughts about things instead of facts about them. We are not to think that all they tell us is true, but read the stories for the truth that is in them.

In them God walks on the earth, and talks with men as if He were Himself a man. Sometimes He sends angels to speak for Him and to do what He wants to have done. This was the old-time way of thinking and speaking; but we may believe that God spoke in the past as He speaks to-day,—that is, in the thought and conscience of those who love Him. Whoever brings to us a word of truth and life is His angel, or messenger.

Sometimes He and His servants do impossible things and things which do not seem to us right or good. This is because the stories come to us from a time when people did not have schools and churches and the same thoughts of what is good and true that we have to-day. But in each story there is a lesson that is as good for us as it was for them of olden time.

These stories were given to us by a nation that gave to the world its best religion; and Jesus, our great leader and teacher, probably knew them as a boy by heart. It is with the hope that they may help those who read them

"To be gentle and loving and true,
Obedient and kind and unselfish, too;
Remember that duty, not pleasure, must lead,
And try every day to be perfect indeed,"

that they are retold in this book.

C. H. P.



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OLD TESTAMENT STORIES.

I. The Story of the Beginning.

The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament showeth his handiwork.—PSALM xix. 1.

And God saw that it was good.—GENESIS i. 10.

Did you ever think where this "great, wide, wonderful world" came from, and how it happened to be "so full of a number of things"?

Wise men of our time tell us what they think about it. They say it was a vast, fiery mist thrown off from the sun. This hot mass slowly cooled, and, as it cooled, water and clouds appeared. A crust formed at the surface, and then, after a long, long time, mosses and other green things began to grow. After them came ferns and fern-like trees, and living creatures in the waters and creeping things and insects on the land. By and by birds and big animals came, and then, after more years than we can think, man appeared as the crowning life of all. They tell us that the earth is not finished yet, for it is ever changing and new forms of life are ever appearing.

We are also told that our world is one of a great number of worlds. Isn't it wonderful to look up into the sky at night and think of the stars as suns with worlds and their moons moving about them, just as the earth with its moon moves about the sun? We say of all this that it is the work of God, that He made it, by which we mean that there is a divine life in all that we see.

In all this we know very little. Our minds are not big enough to understand such great things, but we can be glad that we have the earth for a home, that God has given us minds to think about it and enjoy it, and lips to thank Him for it.

From earliest time, people have thought about it and tried to tell how it all came into being. The first chapter in the Bible tells what the old-time Hebrews thought about it. This is their story:

In the beginning there was only a dark, shapeless mass, in which nothing could be seen. Just as in a cloudy night, when you look out of the window and see nothing but inky blackness, so it was at first. Then the spirit of God moved upon this dark mass, and He said, Let there be light, and there was light. As when one goes to sleep on a dark night and wakes up in the morning in a room flooded with light, so it was on this first morning of creation. The time, when it was light, God called day. Then He caused the darkness to come again, and the dark time He called night. This is what was done on the first day.

The next day God said, Let there be a firmament in the midst of the waters, and let it divide the waters above from those below. So God made a firmament, which was something like a solid sky, with openings through which the water could come down when He wanted to have it rain on the earth. He called this firmament heaven.

The third day God said, Let the waters under the heaven be gathered together unto one place, and let the dry land appear. And it was so. The waters came together, making oceans and seas, and the dry land appeared, with its mountains and valleys. Then grass began to spread as a green carpet over the land. Lovely plants with bright blossoms sprang up, with all kinds of herbs and fruit-trees. Each plant or tree had a seed inside of its blossom or fruit, so that, when it died, there would be a new one to take its place, and there would always be plants and flowers and fruit upon the earth. Then God saw that all this was good.

The fourth day, although there were earth, sea, and sky, there were no sun, moon, and stars, so God said, Let there be lights in the heaven to give light upon the earth, and to divide the time into days, months, and years. And it was so. He made the greater light, the glorious sun, to rule the day, and the lesser light, the pale moon, to rule the night. He made the stars also. And God saw that all was good.

All was beautiful, yet all was quiet. There was no sound save the swish of the water and the sighing of wind in the trees. Now the world is ready for more life. There is land

covered with grass and trees, there is water and sunshine and starlight. So, when the fifth day begins, God said, Let the waters bring forth abundantly the moving creature that hath life, and let there be birds that may fly above the earth in the open firmament of heaven. So God filled the sea with all kinds of fishes from tiny minnows to great whales. Thousands went swimming about as if glad to be alive. Birds, too, began flying through the air, from little humming-birds with gauzy wings to swift-flying eagles, those with brilliant plumage, and those that poured out their song as if in thankfulness to God. And God saw that it was good.

The air and water are now alive with happy living things; but the earth is still waiting. The sixth day God said, Let the earth bring forth the living creature after its kind, cattle, and creeping thing, and beasts of the earth, each after its kind. And it was so. Cattle feed on a thousand hills, gentle creatures run about, creeping things burrow in the ground, wild beasts roam in the forests.

But what is the world made for? Who is to see the grass and herbs and flowers? Who pick the fruit? Who hear the singing of the birds? Surely, for such a world there must be a being who can think and feel and enjoy what God has made.

So on the sixth day came the crowning glory of all. God said, Let us make man in our image, and let him have power over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, over the cattle, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth. So God created man in His own image and blessed him.

And God saw everything that He had made, and, behold! it was very good. Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all things therein.

And on the seventh day God rested, and blessed it as a day of rest because His work was done.

II. A Beautiful Garden.

Children, obey your parents in the Lord; for this is right.—
EPHESIANS vi. 1.

We have learned how the Hebrews thought the world was made, and we know that the account in the Bible is an old story handed down from father to son, and changed, as the way is with stories, as it passed from one to another. These Hebrews saw that people were not altogether good or happy. They had to work hard, and often great troubles came upon them, even after they had done the best they could. Here was the beautiful world. God made it, and saw that it was good, yet there was pain and sadness in it as well as joy and gladness. How could this be so? This was a question which they must often have asked themselves. The following story gives their answer to it.

There was once a garden in the land, far away to the East, called the Garden of Eden (delight). It was more like a beautiful park than a garden. Four rivers wound about it, making the ground moist so the little seeds could grow well. There were great rocks in it that glistened with gold and precious stones, and many different kinds of trees. Some that gave shade, as our elms and maples, and some that had fruit growing on them.

There was one tree in the middle of the garden with a curious name. It was called the tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil.

Now the Lord God had made a man out of the dust of the earth and named him Adam. This man He put into the garden, and told him he could have it for his very own; that he could pick the fruit he wanted from every tree except that of the tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil,—this he must not touch.

God did not want him to be lonely, so He let him have for his very own also the animals He had made and told him he could name them. So he spent many a pleasant hour watching them and taking care of them.

Still, with all the gold and precious stones and all the shade and fruit trees and all the animals for his own, Adam was not quite happy and contented, for he had no one to talk with. So God put him into a sound sleep, and, when he awoke, there was a beautiful woman standing before him. Adam thought he had never seen anything so lovely, and when he found she could speak, and that he had a real companion, he did not feel lonely any more. Together they enjoyed the garden, and felt each day how good it was to be alive. They heard the birds sing, picked the flowers, fed the animals, or wandered by the river-side, happy and free from care. Surely, God was good to give them such a beautiful home.

All went well until Eve began to wish she had some fruit from that tree in the middle of the garden. She watched it ripen day after day, and she did not see how it could hurt her. Besides, coiled up at the foot of the tree was a shining green serpent, with bright eyes, and when he saw how often she came, and how much she wanted the fruit, he said, Did God say you could not have the fruit of every tree in the garden? Eve said, though she must have been surprised to hear a serpent speak, We may eat the fruit of every tree except this one; but God told us not to touch this fruit, for, if we did, we should surely die.

Then the serpent said, That is not so: it will not hurt you to eat it. It will open your eyes and make you know good from evil, that is all. When Eve heard this, and thought how the fruit was not only pleasant to the eye, but would make her wise, she hesitated no longer, but picked some and ate it, and also gave some to Adam, her husband.

Then all at once everything seemed changed. The flowers drooped, the birds hushed their voice, the animals ran from them, and they themselves seemed changed. Before they were so happy and free from care, but now their hearts were as heavy as stones, and they were anxious and troubled. Now they knew what it was to be sad as well as glad. How sorry they were that they had eaten the forbidden fruit!

They heard God's voice calling to them in the cool of the day, saying, Where art thou? and, instead of running

gladly to meet Him as they used to do, they were afraid, and went and hid among the trees. God said, Hast thou eaten of the tree whereof I commanded thee that thou shouldst not eat? Then what do you think Adam said? Instead of bravely owning his fault, he said, The woman whom Thou gavest to be with me, she gave me of the tree, and I did eat. And the Lord God said unto Eve, What is this that thou hast done? Eve tried to excuse herself also, saying, The serpent told me to eat, so I did.

Then the Lord God told the serpent it would always be hated by every one. And, because they had disobeyed him, he sent Adam and Eve out of the Garden, and put two angels with fiery swords at the gate so they could not get back again. They had to work in the fields in the hot sun, to till the ground and sow seed to make bread, and, when cold days came, to make clothes of skin to keep themselves warm.

Although they were driven from the Garden, the world was all before them where to choose, and we shall see in the next story how it fared with them in their new surroundings.

III. The Two Brothers.

Am I my brother's keeper?—GENESIS iv. 9.

We must not think of Adam and Eve as being unhappy all the time after they were driven out of the beautiful Garden of Eden. To be sure, they missed the shady trees, the rippling waters, the flowers and fruits; but God was good to them, for He gave them health and strength for each day's task.

It was hard toiling all day, week after week, in the hot fields, but Adam did not lose his courage. When he picked the ripened grain from the seed that he had sown himself, and realized the joy of making fruit grow in place of thistles, he felt that this was really worth doing, and that it was still good to be alive.

At first, too, it seemed to Eve that she could never make clothes from the skins of wild beasts, nor cook food; but every time she made a garment or ground the corn between two heavy stones, and made bread, she was so pleased with her work that it seemed worth all the trouble it had cost her.

After a time Eve found that she had not only to work for Adam and herself, but for another life that came to earth,—a baby-boy that God gave to them, and whom they named Cain. Now, indeed, she was busy from morning until night, for always there are many things to do for a tiny, helpless baby. By and by another little boy was born to be a brother to Cain, and he was called Abel. Do you suppose these two little brothers loved each other and played happily together? At first they did; but, as they grew older, they often quarreled. Cain was quick-tempered, and was inclined to be wilful and selfish.

If Abel, who was more gentle, found any pretty stones or bright-colored leaves for playthings, Cain was sure to want them. He would tease for them, and show so much temper that his mother often gave him things he ought not to have, just to quiet him and keep peace in the family. He thought that his parents liked Abel's way of talking and acting better

than his own, so a feeling of jealousy grew in his heart. Eve thought when he became a man, busy with his own affairs, he might change for the better; but it is hard to make a good man out of a thoughtless boy.

The sons chose different things to do when they became men. Cain was a farmer. He ploughed the ground, and raised grain and fruit. Abel was a shepherd. He had large flocks of sheep, and was often out in the pastures with them days at a time, tenderly caring for the little lambs.

How do you suppose these brothers thanked God for His goodness to them, for they felt that He had greatly blessed them? The only way they could think of was to bring to Him the best of whatever they had. Perhaps they piled up stones, built a fire on top of them, and put their gifts into it. When the smoke rose to heaven, they thought God would see it and smell it, and be glad. Abel brought to God his best lamb for an offering, and it pleased God. But, when Cain brought some of his fruit, luscious and juicy, for some reason God did not want it. Perhaps it was because He knew there was something wrong in Cain's heart; for you know God cares more for what is in the heart than for any outward thing.

When Cain saw that Abel's present was accepted and his not, he was more angry than he had ever been before. Instead of thinking about something else, he brooded over it with sullen looks and scowling forehead. God said, Why are you thus angry? If thou doest well, your gifts will be accepted; but, if thou doest not well, your sin is all ready to spring upon you, as a young lion crouches at the door ready to spring upon one when it is opened. But Cain would not listen to God's voice. He followed Abel into the fields, saying harsh things to him; and the more he scolded, the angrier he grew, until he hardly knew what he was saying. And then, just as when he was a little boy he used to push and strike his brother when he wanted his playthings, so now he struck him a heavy blow. Abel fell to the ground, and never got up again.

When Cain saw what he had done, he stood half dazed, wondering what would happen. Then he heard God's voice

saying, Where is Abel thy brother? Ah! there was that reproving voice again, always chiding him for wrong-doing. I know not. Am I my brother's keeper? he said. But the voice came back: What hast thou done? Thou canst not conceal the deed. Thou shalt suffer all thy life. Nothing that thou dost plant will grow or blossom or bear fruit: thou shalt be a wanderer on the earth.

Then how sorry Cain felt that he had lost his temper! My punishment is greater than I can bear, he said. How can I leave all that I love and go I know not where! and even from Thy face I shall be hid. Surely, every one that sees me will want to kill me. But God told him it was better that he should live and suffer the memory of his deed; that no one should kill him, for He would warn others in some way of his coming, so they would not touch him.

So Cain left the fields in which he had worked with his father Adam,—left the place where Eve had watched over him so carefully,—and went far away. He wandered on and on, and, wherever he went, he seemed to hear the words, even in the rushing winds and rippling brook, Where is Abel, thy brother?

He came at last to a country called the Land of Nod, but even there the people looked at him with sorrowful faces, and seemed to say, Where is Abel, thy brother? Sometimes he would say to himself, as he did at first: I know not. Am I my brother's keeper? But way down in his heart he felt that his brother should have been as dear to him as his own life, and he should have been glad that God was pleased with his offering.

Thus the years went by, and he grew to be an old and gray-headed man. But because he was sorry for the wrong he had done, and tried to do better, some joy came into his life. He had a wife to cheer him; and in the new land a son was born, whom he called Enoch. He worked hard, and built a city, and named it Enoch after his son.

IV. The Great Flood.

While the earth remaineth, seedtime and harvest, and cold and heat, and summer and winter, and day and night shall not cease.—GENESIS viii. 22.

I wonder how many children know what a flood is? Did you ever see ice break up on a river, when the warm spring sun shone upon it? Perhaps the river has been frozen all winter, making the ice very thick, and, when it melts, there is so much more water that the river overflows its banks, flooding roads and fields; or perhaps it is a heavy rain that causes the water to rise. The little rills up in the mountains become bigger as they flow into brooks, and they in turn grow larger as they feed the river, so the river becomes a rushing torrent, sweeping away bridges, overflowing banks, filling houses with water, tearing up trees, and sometimes causing houses and barns to float.

Stories of floods were common in olden times, and this one was told among the Hebrews. Perhaps the overflowing of some great river gave rise to it.

In the early days of the world people became very wicked. They did not remember to be

“Gentle and loving and true,
Obedient and kind and unselfish, too.”

but were all the time planning to do each other harm. When God saw how bad they were, He was sorry He had ever made them, and decided to destroy everything He had made,—men and beasts, birds and insects,—and every living thing. No, not quite everything; for there was one man who had found grace in His eyes, and his name was Noah. Just as good children like to walk and talk with their father, so Noah “walked with God,” and so God would spare him and his children. He told him how to build a house in which he and his family and two of all kinds of living creatures could live in safety, for He was going to send a great flood upon the earth.

This house was to be built something like a great boat, so that it could float on the water, and was to be called an ark.

Noah did as he was told, and built it of wood, making it large and strong. He filled the cracks with pitch, so the water would not get in. He made a door at the side and a window at the top. It was five hundred feet long, eighty feet broad, and three stories high, with rooms in each story. It must have taken him a long time to build such a strange house, and very likely those near by gathered around it and laughed at him, asking him no end of questions. They could not understand why he wanted such a great boat on dry land. But he paid no attention to them, and worked steadily on.

At last it was finished, and he and his wife and three sons, Shem, Ham, and Japheth, with their wives, and two of every kind of animal and bird and "whatsoever creepeth upon the earth," went into the ark, two by two, as God commanded. Noah provided food enough for them to last a long while. Then he shut the door; and soon the clouds kept growing blacker and blacker, the wind blew harder and harder, and the rain commenced to fall.

For forty days and forty nights it rained and rained and rained, as if all the windows in the sky were open for the water to pour through. The rivers overflowed their banks, the fields and pastures were covered with water. It rose higher and higher, until first the little hills disappeared, and then the great hills, and at last the mountains were covered, and every living thing was drowned. For five months there was nothing but water, water, everywhere. All Noah could see when he looked out of the little window at the top of the ark was the dark sky above, the rain coming down, and the whirling, splashing water below. But the ark was strongly built, and floated safely and steadily, and was lifted up and up, and carried hither and thither, until it finally rested on the top of a high mountain, called Ararat.

Then God remembered how weary Noah and those with him must be, and He stopped the rain, and slowly the waters began to go down, and the wind to dry the earth. And Noah opened the window, and sent forth a raven, which flew to and

fro, and did not return. Next he sent forth a dove, but she could not find a dry spot large enough for the sole of her foot, so she flew back on to his hand that he put out of the window for her to light on. Then he waited a week, and again he sent forth the dove. This time she stayed away all day, and, when she came back, there was an olive leaf in her beak that she had plucked from a tree. Then Noah knew that the tops of the trees were out of the water. Still, he thought the ground was not dry, and he waited patiently another week. Then he sent forth the dove a third time, and she did not come back. Now he was sure there was dry land, and he opened the door, and went out of the ark with his wife and his sons and their wives and all the animals and birds and creeping things.

You know how glad boys and girls are when vacation comes, how they come bounding out of school, and run and jump and shout. We think that that must be the way Noah and his wife and all the animals felt after being shut up all that long time. How good the fresh air and sunshine seemed to them!

Noah hastened to thank God for His goodness to him, just as Cain and Abel did. He heaped up stones for an altar, and the sweet savor of the offering pleased God. And God said, I will not injure living things again as I have done. While the earth remaineth, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, and day and night shall not cease. And God set His bow in the clouds as a sign of this promise. Always after that, when people saw a rainbow with its beautiful colors and its perfect arch in the sky, they called it the Bow of Promise, and were glad that, no matter what happened, there would never be another flood.

V. The Father of a People.

Let there be no strife, I pray thee, between me and thee.—
GENESIS xiii. 8.

Blessed are the peacemakers; for they shall be called the children of God.—MATTHEW v. 9.

The next story in the Bible of any length after the Flood is that of the Tower of Babel, which was probably told by some one to show how there came to be different languages in the world. It says people were so bold that they tried to build a tower reaching up to heaven, but God did not like it, and came down and set them to using different words, so they could not understand each other. They had to stop building, and the place was called Babel, which means confusion.

After this legend we come to the first of a series of stories of the patriarchs, that is, of men who were supposed to be the fathers of the Hebrew people.

Almost all countries have wonderful stories about their early leaders. These in the Bible show what kind of people were most admired and were thought most pleasing to God by the Israelites.

There was living once in a place called Haran a good man named Abraham. He thought he heard God's voice telling him to leave his father's house and go far away to the south, that he might start a new nation. He was not a young man, and the way was all unknown to him; but he could not worship in the way he thought was right where he was, for people about him bowed down to idols or images of stone or brass or wood or worshiped the moon and stars. So he did not hesitate to obey.

One fine morning he set out for his new home, taking with him his wife Sarah, his nephew Lot, and many servants, also sheep and cattle, for he was a rich man. Of course there were no railroads or carriages in those far-away days. Tall camels carried the women and children and the household goods on their backs, while the servants ran along by their sides to

guide them, and also drove the flocks and herds. How we should like to see such a caravan! Abraham riding in front, wearing a scarlet robe, a bright turban on his head and sandals on his feet, carrying a spear, because he was the chief; Sarah just behind, decked in her gay striped shawl, adorned with gold necklaces, bracelets, and earrings.

After the day's march the servants would quickly unfold and set up the tents of black goat's hair; the evening meal would be cooked in the stone ovens and eaten from the decorated clay dishes. Then, after a night's rest, the party would move on at early dawn before the heat of the day. They went slowly, crossed a big river called the Euphrates, and after a long journey, through deep valleys, rocky plains, and wooded hills, reached Canaan, the land to which Abraham thought God wanted him to go. Even here, however, he journeyed from place to place, seeking green pasture land and clear springs of water. But, wherever he went, he never forgot to make an altar of stones, and offer fruit or a lamb to God for His goodness to him in leading him safely on.

Once, when they had settled down for a time at a place called Bethel, Abraham heard a loud shouting. Hurrying to the door of the tent, he saw what had often happened before,—a quarrel between Lot's herdsmen and his own. The flocks of sheep and herds of cattle of each had grown so large in this new country that there was hardly room enough for them, and the herdsmen were driving each other's flocks away. Abraham might have grown angry at the sight, and called Lot to him to say that he could not be bothered by such disputes, and that he had better see if he could not find a new place in which to stay. But he was too generous to talk in that way. Instead he said: Let there be no strife, I pray thee, between me and thee or between my herdsmen and thy herdsmen; for we are brothers. Is not the whole land before thee? Separate thyself, I pray thee, from me: if thou wilt take the left hand, I will go to the right; or, if thou depart to the right hand, then I will go to the left. Was not that generous? If every one would say, Let there be no strife, I pray thee, between me and thee, what a happy world this would be!

When Lot heard that he could take his choice of the land, he picked out what seemed to him the best spot,—the rich valley of the Jordan River, near a big city called Sodom; but he had not been there long before he was in great trouble. Five robber kings came from the East, and made war on the king of Sodom and also on the king of Gomorrah, another city near by. These robbers stole all their treasures, carried away their food, and took Lot away with all his possessions. The kings of Sodom and Gomorrah fled for their lives, and in their haste fell into some slime pits, while the rest of the people hid in the mountains. But one man escaped, and ran and told Abraham.

When he heard the news, this kind-hearted uncle took over three hundred of his armed servants, and chased the robber kings a long distance. He brought back the frightened Lot and all the goods that had been stolen. Then the kings of Sodom and Gomorrah were rescued, and they praised Abraham for his bravery. They said he ought to keep the goods himself that he had recovered to pay him for what he had done. But Abraham said to the king of Sodom, I have lifted up mine hand unto the Lord, the most high God, the possessor of heaven and earth, that I will not take anything, not even a thread, nor a shoe latchet, nor anything that is thine. Abraham said this because he believed the king of Sodom was not a good man, and he would not accept favors from him.

Abraham was not a perfect man. How could he be in those early days? We can think of him, however, as one who loved and trusted God, and tried to live in peace with those around him. Shall we not be glad to hear more about him?

VI. A Great Trial.

To obey is better than sacrifice.—I SAMUEL XV. 22.

One day Abraham sat in the door of his tent, resting from the hot rays of the sun. There was scarcely a breath of wind stirring or a cloud in the sky. Around him were clumps of massive oak-trees, stretching out their branches to the heavens. In front were wide fields of wheat and barley; beyond rose the hills on which flocks of sheep were feeding. Happy laughter of children came to his ears. He felt very thankful to God for this beautiful country, and he thought, if he only had a son to be the chief of his tribe after he was gone, he would be perfectly happy. He was getting old, and, although he had many dreams or visions in which God told him that he was to be the father of a great people, there seemed little hope of any of them coming true. In one of these God told him to look up and see if he could count the stars, for there would be as many people in his country as there were stars in heaven, and, again, that they would be like the sand of the seashore in number.

As he sat there, wondering how this would come about, he lifted up his eyes and saw three men a little way off, coming towards him. Abraham was always kind to strangers, and he quickly ran towards them, bowed low, saying to the one who seemed to lead the way: My lord, if now I have found favor in thy sight, pass not away, I pray thee, from thy servant. Let a little water be fetched, and wash your feet, and rest yourselves under this tree; and I will fetch a morsel of bread, and comfort your hearts. After that ye shall pass on. Let me be your servant. They said, So do as thou hast said.

Abraham hastened to the tent, and said to Sarah, his wife: Make ready quickly three measures of fine meal. Knead it, and make cakes upon the hearth. Then he quickly had some meat roasted, sent his servants for milk and butter, and brought this dainty lunch to his guests, standing by as they ate, to see if anything more was needed. While they were resting and

eating, one of them turned to Abraham, and said, Where is Sarah, thy wife? Abraham answered, Behold, she is in the tent. Then the guest said, I have heard of her great longing for a little son. Her wish shall be granted. When Sarah heard this, she laughed at the idea, for she thought they were too old to take care of a little baby.

A little later the strangers went on towards Sodom, where Lot lived, and Abraham went with them to show the way. Who do you think these strangers proved to be? As they talked together Abraham discovered he had been kind to angels. And what they said would happen did really come true; for some time after this a baby-boy was born into Abraham's home. This time Sarah laughed for joy, and not only Sarah, but all the servants and people, they were so glad a son was born to rule over them when Abraham died. He was named Isaac, which means laughter.

We think he must have been a happy child, and that he grew up to be "loving, gentle, and true, Obedient and kind and unselfish, too." We do not know much about his childhood, only that there was a great birthday feast for him when he was about three years old. We think he kept pretty close to his father, going about the place with him, and learning to do the things he did.

When he was quite a lad, a strange and terrible thought came to Abraham. To understand it, we must remember that in that early time people feared God more than they loved Him. They imagined He was often angry with them, and thought, if they put on their altars the very best things they had, they could win His love. He thought he heard God's voice saying, Abraham, and he answered, Here am I. God said, Take now thine only son Isaac, whom thou lovest, and get thee into the land of Moriah, and offer him for a burnt-offering upon one of the mountains, which I will tell thee of.

The old man did not hesitate to obey, although it seemed like taking his own life. He rose up early the next morning, saddled his ass, took two of the servants with him to carry the bundles of wood to burn, and set out with Isaac to the mountain. It was three days' journey, and he went slowly

along with heavy heart. But Isaac, in this first journey from home, skipped about gleefully, noting the beautiful hills, the bright flowers, and the singing of the birds.

At last the mountain rose up before them, and Abraham said to the young men, Stay ye here while I and the lad will go yonder and worship, and come again to you. So the boy and his father set off together, Isaac carrying the wood, and Abraham a burning torch in one hand and his knife in the other. Silently he led the way, Isaac bravely trudging on behind with the heavy bundle of wood, no doubt proud to be his father's helper and companion. As they neared the top of the mountain, Isaac said, My father? Abraham replied, Here am I, my son. Isaac said, I see the fire and the wood; but where is the lamb for the burnt-offering? Abraham answered, My son, God will provide a lamb for a burnt-offering. So they went silently on their way again until they reached the mountain-top. Then Abraham heaped up great rocks that were scattered about, placed the wood in order, and, clasping Isaac in his arms, laid him on the altar. But instantly a voice from the sky called out, Abraham? Abraham? and he said, Here am I. The voice said, Lay not thine hand upon the lad, neither do thou anything to him; for now I know that thou fearest God, seeing that thou hast not withheld thy son, thine only son, from me.

What joy was in Abraham's heart as he looked up and saw a sheep right behind him, caught in the bushes by his horns! He took it, and offered it up instead of Isaac. Then he was praised for being willing to do as he thought God wished him to do, and told that he would be blessed.

How gladly father and son came down the mountain-side. Never before did the air seem so sweet or the sky so blue. God was good! Isaac was alive! Never again should such a sacrifice be made, no more such terrible thoughts fill his mind. This was the lesson learned that day.

VII. A Happy Marriage.

Well done, thou good and faithful servant.—MATTHEW XXV. 21.

This is a story without anything sad in it. Are you not glad? We wish that there could never be anything but sunshine and flowers, the singing of birds, the laughter of children, and all joyous sights and sounds in the world. Perhaps that good time may come some day; but, as we look about, we have to see many sad and bad things mixed with the good, though we think that these are becoming fewer and fewer each year. Now we are to learn how a beautiful young woman becomes the wife of a fine and strong young man. I wonder if you can guess the man's name? It was the little Isaac, now grown up, who came near being sacrificed by his father Abraham.

Since then his dear mother, Sarah, had died, and his father, now very old, was anxious to have his son happily married. Yet he did not know any maidens in the land of Canaan who seemed good enough for his son, and their worship did not please him. His thoughts went back to his old home beyond the great river, to the time when he was young and Sarah was chosen to be his wife; and he felt sure that a good wife could be found in that home land for Isaac. It was too long a journey for him to take, so he decided to send his trusty servant Eliezer.

Eliezer set out, taking with him ten camels, laden with bright shawls, dresses, and jewels for the bride that was to be. The road he took was the same that Abraham traveled years before when he came to Canaan, part of it rough and hilly, with mountain peaks pointing skyward, and part of it through sandy plains. But the hard traveling did not trouble him so much as the thought as to whether he would be able to find the right kind of a wife for Isaac, one who was good and kind as well as beautiful in appearance.

As he was wondering how he should succeed, he drew near a city. It was towards evening, the time, after the heat of the

day, when the women came out to a large well near the gate, to draw water for their households. As he watched them in the distance, a happy thought came to him. It was to ask several for a drink of water, and, if one should say, *Drink, and I will give thy camels drink also*, he would know such an one had a kind heart and would make a good wife. Then he made his camels kneel down by the well, bowed his head, and prayed, *O Lord God of my master Abraham, send me good speed this day, and show kindness unto my master Abraham.*

He had scarcely finished before a maiden, called Rebekah, came out of the city gate with her pitcher on her shoulder. She was very beautiful, and, as she advanced to the well and filled her pitcher, Eliezer stepped forward, saying, *Let me, I pray thee, drink a little water from thy pitcher.* She quickly took her pitcher from her shoulder, and gave him a drink. When he had finished, she said, *I will draw for thy camels also, until they have done drinking.* And she ran to the well again, and drew enough for all his camels.

Oh, how eagerly the old servant watched her, wondering all the while if this good and beautiful maiden would consent to return to Canaan with him! He thanked her, and gave her two heavy gold bracelets and a gold ring, saying, *Whose daughter art thou? Tell me, I pray thee, is there room in thy father's house for us to lodge in?* When she said her father's name was Bethuel, the son of Nahor, and that she lived in Haran, his joy was great; for Nahor, who had died a long time ago, was Abraham's own brother. He thanked God for this good fortune.

Rebekah ran and told her family what had happened. Her brother Laban hastened to the well, saying: *Come in, thou blessed of the Lord. Wherefore standest thou without? There is room in our home for you.* So the men took off their sandals to bathe their dusty feet, removed the trappings from the camels' backs, and gave them beds of clean straw.

As they entered the house, food was placed before them. But Eliezer would not eat until he told them his errand,—how Abraham, his master, was a great chief, owning flocks and

herds, and having silver and gold, men-servants and maid-servants; how he, Eliezer, was sent to find a wife for his master's son, Isaac. He told of his plan to make sure that he got the right one, and how he prayed for God's blessing, and of Rebekah's coming to the well, and giving him and his camels water. He ended by saying, And now, if ye will deal kindly and truly with my master Abraham, tell me what to do.

Bethuel, Rebekah's father, and Laban, her brother, both exclaimed when he had finished: It is God's will! Rebekah may go. Then Eliezer gave more jewels of silver and gold and beautiful dresses to Rebekah. He gave also to her brother and mother precious things, and they had a feast in which all the servants joined.

The next morning Eliezer said he must go back at once, as Abraham was anxiously awaiting his return. But Rebekah's mother and brother, knowing how much they would miss her, said, Oh, do not hurry back. Stay at least ten days. To which Eliezer replied, Do not hinder me. Rebekah herself shall decide, they said. Rebekah, they asked, wilt thou go with this man? She answered, I will go. So the next morning she and her maid-servant mounted the camels, and set off with the party.

Several days after this Isaac was walking in the fields near his home towards evening. He was thinking and wondering about Eliezer's journey, when he looked down the road, and, behold, the camels were coming. As they drew near, Rebekah saw him and said to Eliezer, What man is this that is walking in the field to meet us? It is my master, replied Eliezer. Then Rebekah covered her face with her veil as she alighted from her camel, for in that land the husband did not look upon the face of the one whom he was to marry until after the wedding.

We may be sure the faithful servant was praised for his wise choice, and that Isaac loved Rebekah dearly. He took her to his mother's tent, and they lived happily together.

VIII. Getting a Blessing.

Be kindly affectioned one to another with brotherly love; in honor preferring one another.—ROMANS xii. 10.

In the last story we found that Isaac and Rebekah were married and lived happily in Sarah's tent. Several years later there might have been seen in it two brothers playing together. Yet, if we did not know they were brothers, we could never suspect it, they were so unlike each other. The elder boy's name was Esau. He was big and strong, with rough skin and coarse hair. Jacob was the other boy's name. He was slight and delicate, with smooth skin and silky hair.

They were just as different in their play as in their looks. Esau was rude and boisterous. He seldom sat still. He learned to use the bow and arrow almost as soon as he could walk; was a fine shot, and would run all over the fields, shouting and chasing any wild animals that might venture near.

But Jacob could hardly shoot at all. He played quietly about the tent, sitting by his mother while she told him stories, or worked in the garden. This pleased Rebekah, for she had no little daughter for a companion; and he became more dear to her every year. Yet Isaac thought it better for boys to roam about, and, as they grew older, when Esau would come home, bringing a fine deer he had shot, he would praise him for his skill.

Rebekah said he ought to praise Jacob also for the vegetables and fruit he raised, but Isaac paid little heed to this.

One day, when the brothers were quite big boys, Esau came home from a long tramp in the woods, as hungry as he could be. He saw Jacob cooking a delicious soup made of lentils, or small red beans. Give me, I pray thee, some of that red pottage (another name for soup), for I am faint with hunger, he said. Jacob, however, was not generous enough to give his brother a good meal without pay, and he thought it a good chance to ask for something which he and his mother had long wanted.

Give me your birthright, he said, and you shall have the soup.

In that country the oldest son received twice as much property as the others when the father died, besides being chief or ruler of the family; and this privilege was called the birthright. Jacob wanted it, and his mother encouraged him in the wish. Foolish Esau! He said, Well, if I don't eat right away, I shall certainly starve to death, and then the birthright will do me no good, so you may as well have it. Thus the bargain was made. Esau had the good dinner, and Jacob obtained the birthright.

Time passed, and the boys were now quite grown up, and Esau had forgotten all about the way he sold his birthright. One day his father, who was now old and almost blind, called him to him, saying, My son! Behold! I am here, replied Esau. Then Isaac said, I am old, and may die soon. Now, therefore, take thy bow and arrows and go to the fields and get some venison, and cook it. Bring it to me, that I may eat. Then will I bless thee before I die. Esau gladly took his bow and arrows, and went to hunt as he was told.

Rebekah, the mother, heard this conversation, and she called Jacob to her, and repeated it to him, adding: Now do just as I say. Go to the flock and fetch me two good kids. I will cook them so that they will taste just like venison. Then you shall take them to your father. His eyesight is so poor he will think you are Esau, and you will receive his blessing.

Wasn't it a pity that a mother should urge her son to deceive his father? In her love for her favorite son and in the thought that he was better fitted to rule than his careless brother, she lost sight of the right.

Jacob agreed to the scheme, but said, Perhaps father will put his hand on me and feel that my skin is smooth instead of rough and hairy, like Esau's. Then he will discover I am deceiving him, and instead of his blessing I shall have his curses (meaning evil wishes).

But his mother answered, If that happens, I will take the blame.

So the kids were cooked. Jacob was dressed in Esau's

best fur clothes. The skins of the kids he had brought her were fastened on his hands and neck; and he took the savory meat and some bread to Isaac, calling out as he came near, My father! The old man, who was resting in his tent, replied, Here am I. Who art thou, my son? Jacob said, I am Esau, the first-born. I have done as thou badest me. Arise, I pray thee, sit and eat of my venison, that thy soul may bless me. Isaac was surprised to know that the venison was ready so soon, for usually Esau was away several hours hunting. He said, How is it that thou hast found it so quickly, my son? And Jacob answered,—oh, how ashamed he must have felt! —Because the Lord thy God brought it to me.

Isaac could not see, and said just what Jacob thought he would. Come nearer, I pray thee, that I may feel thee, my son, whether thou be my very son Esau or not. Jacob drew near, and his father said, as he felt of him, The voice is Jacob's voice, but the hands are the hands of Esau. Art thou my very son Esau? Jacob said (just see how one falsehood leads to another), I am. So Isaac ate the food, and he kissed Jacob, and, raising his hands, blessed him, saying, May God give you of the dew of heaven and the riches of the land and plenty of corn and wine. Let people serve thee and nations bow down to thee: be lord over thy brethren, and thy mother's son bow down to thee.

He finished, and Jacob had scarcely left him when Esau came in from his hunting with the venison he had just cooked. He called out in his cheery way, Let my father arise, and eat of his son's venison, that his soul may bless me! Isaac started up in alarm, saying, Who art thou? And the reply came, I am thy son, thy first-born, Esau.

The poor old father trembled very much, and said, Then where is he that hath taken venison and brought it to me and I have eaten of, all before thou camest, and have blessed him?

When Esau heard this he cried, bitterly, saying, Bless me also, O my father! And Isaac said, Thy brother slyly came in, and hath taken away thy blessing.

This makes twice he has deceived me, said Esau, still angry.

He took away my birthright once, and now my blessing. But can't you give me one, too? But Isaac answered, Behold! I have made him the ruler over thee, and of all people, and have asked for him the richest ground for his crops; and now what can I do for thee, my son? Then Esau wept harder than ever, saying, Hast thou but one blessing, O my father? Bless me, even me also, O my father.

Isaac thought a moment, and then said, Behold! thou shalt have rich fields watered by the dew of heaven. Thou shalt live by thy sword, and shalt serve thy brother. But in time to come thou shalt be free.

Esau wiped away the tears, but felt very angry towards his brother, who had secured his blessing. He said, When my father dies, I will kill Jacob. Rebekah was told of this, and calling Jacob to her, bade him leave home as quick as he could, and stay away until Esau felt better. We shall see what happened to him.

IX. Seeking a Fortune.

Surely the Lord is in this place; and I knew it not.—GENESIS xxviii. 6.

And Jacob served seven years for Rachel; and they seemed unto him but a few days, for the love he had to her.—GENESIS xxix. 20.

Jacob deceived his brother Esau, and obtained a father's blessing. Now, following the advice of his mother, Rebekah, he is going to try to find his uncle Laban's home in Haran. This was the same place to which the old servant Eliezer, journeyed years before, when he found Rebekah by the well, and asked her to return with him to Canaan to be Isaac's wife. Her own son Jacob is now going to see the birthplace of his mother, and meet her brother and his family, and try to make a place for himself in the world. Yet he was not happy at the thought of going. He was to leave without Esau's good-bye and with no family feast to bid him God-speed. He hurriedly packed up a few necessary things, and set out, not knowing when, if ever, he should come back to the home where he had spent so many happy days.

One day, at sunset, he found himself on a hillside among some jagged rocks. He chose a smooth flat stone for a pillow, and, after his lonely and tiresome journey, was soon fast asleep. He had a wonderful dream. He dreamed that he saw a ladder set up on the earth, the top of it reaching to heaven, and up there, among the clouds, God was standing. Beautiful angels were going up and down on the ladder. As he watched them he heard God's voice telling him not to be discouraged, for He would take care of him wherever he went, even till he came back again to his own land. Then Jacob awoke with a start, and looked about him. The ladder and angels were gone, and he could see nothing but the stars silently shining in the sky and the dim shapes of the rocks and hills about him. Yet the dream seemed so real that he said: Surely the Lord is in this place; and I knew it not. This is no other than the house of God, and this is the gate of Heaven.

In the early morning he arose, took the flat stone which he had used for a pillow, and set it up on end, so that it looked like a monument. He poured oil on it, and called it Bethel, which means the house of God. He said to himself: If God will really be with me and take care of me, and give me food and clothes, so that I can come back to my father and live in peace, then will I worship Him. And of all that he gives me I will surely give back one-tenth part to Him. He went on lighter-hearted now, and at last came to a large green pasture where flocks of sheep were feeding.

In the middle of it was a well covered with a heavy stone to keep the water clean, and a few herdsmen were standing near by. Jacob went up to them, and asked them where they lived. When they said, In Haran, near by, he was glad, because it meant that he had reached the end of his journey. Do you know Laban, the son of Nahor? was his next question. They said, Oh, yes, we know him. Is he well? asked Jacob. They answered: Yes, he is well. We are waiting for Rachel, his daughter, to come with his sheep. Then we are going to roll the stone off of the well, and water all of our sheep together. Jacob said, It is noon now, and it will be a long time before all the flocks and herds are gathered together. Why don't you water the sheep that are here, and then feed them? They said, We cannot do that until the men come with the others. Then we will all together roll the stone from the top of the well, and water the flocks. As they spoke, Jacob looked, and saw a lovely girl coming across the field. The little lambs were frisking along by her side, and the sheep following close behind.

His heart bounded within him to think she was his cousin, for he was sure he had never seen any one half so beautiful before.

He did not wait for the men to come to uncover the well. He seemed for the moment as strong as a giant, and rushed forward and pushing the heavy stone away with all his might, watered her sheep. Then he told her who he was, and kissed her, and cried for joy, he was so glad to be among friends once more, and we may be sure Rachel was glad that

the gallant stranger was her cousin Jacob. She ran and told her father, Laban, who came out to the field, gave Jacob a hearty greeting, and brought him to his home. Jacob spent a happy month with them, but he was not idle, and, when Laban saw how helpful he was, he said: Because you are a relative, it is no reason why you should work for nothing. Tell me what I shall give you for wages?

That gave Jacob a chance to say what he had been thinking about ever since he first saw Rachel. Let me work for you seven years, he pleaded, and at the end of that time give me Rachel for my wife. His uncle agreed to this; and then how happy Jacob was! He worked early and late,—spring, summer, autumn, winter,—seven whole years, but it seemed to him only a few days because of the love he had for Rachel.

But just as Jacob deceived his brother Esau, and got the blessing from his father, so Laban deceived Jacob, for he made him think on the night of the marriage that his plain elder daughter, Leah, was Rachel, and, as her face was covered by a veil until after the wedding, Jacob did not discover it. He was angry when he found who she was, and asked Laban why he had treated him so, when he had worked faithfully for him. He might have been more angry if he had not remembered his own early deception. Laban excused himself by saying that in his country the elder daughter was always married before the younger sister. But he could work for him another seven years, and marry Rachel. This Jacob agreed to do, and we are glad to think of him as happy with his Rachel at last.

X. Back to the Old Home.

The Lord watch between me and thee, when we are absent one from another.—GENESIS xxxi. 49.

But, if a brother be overtaken in a fault, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted.—GALATIANS vi. 1.

Twenty years have passed, and instead of a lonely boy leaving home to seek his fortune, Jacob is now a rich man, owning large flocks and herds, and having many servants and a large family of children. All this, however, did not bring him happiness, for his uncle Laban and his sons also were jealous of him because he was so prosperous, and then he had to work very hard.

Although he still feared Esau, Jacob longed to go back to his old home. When he decided to do this, he thought it would be better to say nothing to Laban about it, but leave quietly when Laban was away, shearing his sheep.

Leah and Rachel were quite willing to go also, and we may be sure the children thought it great fun to get ready to go to a new home hundreds of miles away. Reuben and Simeon and Judah were old enough to help pack, and the younger boys doubtless pretended they were loading the camels, while little Joseph, the pride and joy of his fond parents, was none too young to be interested in it all.

They hurried along without a mishap until one night, as they were camping among some hills on the border of his own country, Jacob looked back, and saw, to his grief, Laban and his friends following him. They pitched their tents near by, and Laban soon came to him, saying angrily, Why did you flee away from me with my daughters, as if they were captives taken in war? If you had only told me you were going, I could have had a parting feast with singing and music, and could have kissed them good-bye. You have done foolishly, and it is in my power to harm you, but I dreamed last night that the God of your father told me not to speak to thee, good or bad, about it.

Then it was Jacob's turn to be angry. He told Laban that he had worked for him year after year,—in summer, when the pastures were dry and the sun hot; in winter, when it was so cold and chilly at night that he could not sleep,—and that his wages had been changed ten times. Jacob did not admit, however, that he himself had been grasping. It might have been quite a quarrel if Laban had not said: Well, we will not fight against each other. Let us pile up these stones for a monument to show that we will keep peace. They did so, and offered sacrifices to God. Then they had a parting meal together, and the next morning Laban kissed them all good-bye, and went back to Haran.

Now Jacob went on his way. He was over the trouble of parting with Laban, but now he thought more than ever of the danger of meeting Esau. When some messengers, whom he had sent ahead to tell Esau he was coming and that he hoped for a kind greeting, came back, they said, We came to your brother, and he is on his way to meet you with four hundred men.

Jacob was just as frightened as he could be. He divided his people into two sections, and said, If Esau comes to fight us, he will attack one section, and then the other can escape. Then he prayed (as many do when in trouble), saying, O God of my father Abraham and God of my father Isaac, who hast blessed me, I am not worthy of Thy mercies. I know I have often done wrong, but save me from my brother, for I fear him, lest he come and smite me and the mother and the children.

But he did something more than pray. He chose two hundred of his best sheep, two hundred goats, many camels and oxen, and told his servants to go on ahead with them to meet Esau, hoping by this present to win his love. Put a space between each drove, he said, and when Esau, my brother, meets you, and asks who you are and where you are going and whose are these droves of cattle, tell him they belong to thy servant, Jacob. It is a present sent unto my lord, Esau, and my master is just behind us. This he told the driver of the second drove and the driver of the third,

and so on to the last, hoping to make a great impression upon Esau.

That night Jacob had another dream,—that all the night long he wrestled with a man. Towards morning he called out, Let me go, for the day breaketh. I will not let thee go except thou bless me, said Jacob. The man said, What is thy name? He answered, Jacob. Thou shalt be called Israel (prince) after this, said the man, for as a prince hast thou gained power with God and men, and hast won a victory. Jacob awoke, and said, Truly I have seen God face to face, and my life is saved. He felt he was now to lead a new and better life.

In the morning he went forward to meet Esau, whom he saw coming in the distance. He put the servants and their children first, next Leah and her children, and last, to be safest, Rachel and Joseph. Then he went up to Esau, and bowed low to the ground seven times.

Now what do you suppose Esau did? Instead of being very angry, as Jacob feared, he ran up to him, put his arms around his neck, and kissed him; and they cried together for joy. Then Esau said, Who are these with thee? The children that God has been good enough to give to me, was the answer. Then the servants came near, and bowed low before Esau. Leah and her children followed, making low bows, and last of all came the beautiful Rachel with Joseph. Esau smiled upon all, and said, What did you mean by sending those droves of cattle ahead of you? They were a gift for you, said Jacob. The generous-hearted Esau replied, I have enough, my brother. Keep them for yourself. But Jacob urged him, saying, Take them, I pray thee, with my blessing, for God has been good to me, and I have enough. So Esau accepted the gift, saying, Come, let us go, I will show the way. Jacob told him not to wait for him, for the little children and the lambs were too young to travel fast.

So the meeting was over, and each went on his way, Jacob lighter-hearted than ever before. He journeyed on from place to place, and at last reached his old home in season to see his father, Isaac, before he died.

XI. The Coat of Many Colors.

He that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen?—I JOHN iv. 20.

Is not the life more than meat, and the body than raiment?—MATTHEW vi. 25.

One pleasant summer morning, when fleecy clouds were sailing across the blue sky and the grass was fresh with dew, a fine-looking boy, wearing a handsome coat of many colors, might have been seen wandering in the fields in the land of Canaan. As he went along, he met a man, and asked him if he had seen some young men with flocks of sheep anywhere. They are my brothers, and my father is sending me to see how they are getting on. I am Joseph, Jacob's son, from Hebron, and I have lost my way, he explained. Oh, yes, said the man. I saw them not long since, and heard them say they were going to Dothan to see if they could find better pasturage. The boy thanked him, and went on his way.

He had a long tramp yet before him, and it was almost noon when he espied a group of young men resting from the sun's hot rays under some trees, while sheep and goats were feeding near. They also saw him, and, as he drew near, exclaimed, Here comes our brother, that dreamer. Come, let us kill him, and drop him into an empty pit. Then we can tell our father that he was eaten by wild beasts. What cruel men, we say! Why should they wish to do such a dreadful thing?

There were several reasons. This "dreamer," Joseph, was the same baby-boy who, with Rachel, his mother, was placed last in the procession when the family left Haran years before, that he might be out of danger from Esau. Since then Rachel had died, leaving a little baby called Benjamin; and these two youngest children had always been especially dear to Jacob, the father, making the other brothers jealous of them. Joseph had a handsome coat and fine clothes made for him, while the others dressed in plain sheepskin. He came to think of himself as better than they, and sometimes told tales about them to his father.

Once he dreamed that they were all binding sheaves of wheat in the fields, and their sheaves bowed down to his sheaf, as if he was the lord; and, again, that the sun, moon, and eleven stars bowed down to him. Even his father, though he did not doubt that he was to be a great man, rebuked him for telling this dream, saying, Shall I and thy mother and thy brethren, indeed, come to bow down ourselves to the earth to thee? So, when the brothers saw him coming towards them, they said to each other: Here comes this dreamer. Come now, therefore, let us kill him, and throw him into a pit. Then we shall see what will become of his dreams.

But, when the brothers proposed to make an end of him, Reuben, the eldest brother, said, Oh, no, don't kill him, but throw him into a pit in the woods, and leave him there; for he intended, after they had gone away, to pull him out and bring him safely home. They agreed to take Reuben's advice. So they stripped off his pretty coat of many colors, and, in spite of his cries and fears, threw him into the pit. Then they calmly sat down to eat their luncheon, as if nothing unusual had happened.

It was not long before they saw a company of merchants coming on their camels, laden with spices and balm and myrrh. They were on their way to a great country south of them, called Egypt. Then one of the brothers, whose name was Judah, spoke up, and said, What do we gain if we leave Joseph in the pit? Let us sell him instead to these men. That is better than leaving him to die, for he is our brother. Reuben was at a distance, and did not hear; and the rest agreed.

They drew the frightened boy out of the pit, and sold him to these merchants for twenty pieces of silver, who quickly went on their way, pleased with their bargain. It seems strange to us that anybody could be sold as if he were a dog or a horse, yet it was often done in those days, and even in our time before people realized how wrong it is.

In the mean time Reuben, the kind-hearted brother, hastened to the pit to rescue Joseph. What was his surprise to find him gone. He was in despair, and ran to his brothers, saying, The boy is not there. What shall I do? But the wicked

brothers paid no attention to him. They had been busy dipping his pretty coat in the blood of a kid which they had killed, and were setting out for home. When they saw their father, they showed the coat to him, saying, This we have found. Is it thy son's coat? Jacob looked at it, and exclaimed in a trembling voice, It is my son's coat. Some wild beast has killed him, and he is no doubt torn to pieces. Then how the poor father wept! The brothers were sorry by this time, when they fully realized what they had done, and they tried to comfort him; but it was of no use. I shall mourn for my son all my days, he said. We shall see by and by that his sorrow was turned to joy. But first we must find out what happened to Joseph.

When he reached Egypt, the merchants sold him to a general named Potiphar. Such a strange country he found himself in!—very different from the simple home he had left. There were great buildings, tall monuments, and fine palaces with costly furnishings. The work he had to do was new to him. Yet, although he was only seventeen years old, he did it so well that little by little he became the manager of his master's great estate. He had to take care of the storehouses filled with food and with gold and silver dishes, and oversee his master's vineyards and brick-yards. He often thought of his dear father and of his little brother Benjamin, and longed to see them. But, when he felt homesick, he worked all the harder, trying to become interested in what he was doing. He believed God was watching over him, and some time all would be well.

XII. The Slave who became Governor.

Love suffereth long, and is kind.—1 CORINTHIANS xiii. 4.
From whence cometh my help? My help cometh from the Lord, who made heaven and earth.—PSALM cxxi. 1, 2.

In this wonderful country of Egypt to which Joseph came there was a great ruler, called Pharaoh. One night he had a strange dream that troubled him very much. We know at that time people believed that dreams could come true. In the morning he called to him all the wise men of the court, told them this dream, and asked them what it meant. The wise men listened, and looked at him and looked at each other, and thought and thought; but no one could tell its meaning. The king was getting discouraged, when the chief butler spoke up, and said: I do remember my faults this day. You were angry with me two years ago, and put me in prison. While there, I had a curious dream, and a young Hebrew told me it meant that I should be restored to my place. He asked me to remember him when it was well with me, and show him kindness, for he had done nothing wrong, but I had forgotten him. When Pharaoh heard this, he sent for the young man, and he was hastily brought out of the dungeon.

Who do you think this young man was? It was none other than Joseph, whom the wicked wife of Potiphar had caused to be put in prison for no wrong-doing whatever. Now, dressed in fresh garments, he came and stood before the king, who was sitting in great splendor on his throne.

Then said the king: I have dreamed a dream, and no one can tell its meaning. I have heard that you can tell what dreams mean. Joseph bowed low, saying, I cannot do so alone. God helps me to understand them. Then Pharaoh told his dream,—that he stood upon the bank of a river, and saw seven fat cows come up out of the river, and begin to feed in a meadow. After that came seven thin cows, the thinnest he had ever seen, and the thin cows ate up the fat cows. Following that dream was another, in which he saw seven good ears of corn growing on a stalk, and after them grew seven

withered ears, and these seven withered ears of corn ate up the seven good ears.

Joseph anxiously listened, fearing he might not be able to understand these dreams; but, when Pharaoh finished, he said: God gave these dreams, which mean the same thing, to show what is about to happen. The seven lean cows (representing famine or hunger) that ate up the seven fat cows (representing plenty) show that there are to be seven years of famine, in which everything that has grown in the seven years of plenty will be eaten. The second dream, telling how the seven withered ears ate up the seven good ears, shows the same thing, and was given to make sure that the king understood.

Now, therefore, said Joseph, let Pharaoh look for a man with wise understanding, and set him to rule over Egypt. He must have some one see to it that there are officers all over the land to gather up the corn, and save it during the seven years of plenty, so, when the seven years of famine come, the people will not starve. The king and all his councillors agreed that this was a very sensible thing to do. But can we find such a man in whom the spirit of God is? said Pharaoh. Then, when he looked on Joseph's face with the straightforward look in his eyes, and saw how honest and manly he appeared, he exclaimed, There is no one else so good and wise as you. You shall be over my house, and rule my people.

And Pharaoh took off his ring, and put it on Joseph's hand, put a gold chain around his neck, saying, See, I have set thee over all the land of Egypt. Was not that a great change of fortune for a slave to be taken out of prison, and in a few moments be made next to the king himself in power? Some might say it was just good luck. But we may be sure, if Joseph had not been kind and helpful to those in the prison and if he had not kept his trust in God, he would not have had a chance to serve the king.

Seven happy years for Joseph followed. Pharaoh gave him a priest's daughter for a wife, and two little boys were born into his home. He had a fine chariot in which to ride; and, when he went about the country, all the people bowed down

before him. There was plenty of corn, as he said there would be, and he was very busy having it gathered up in great storehouses, which he had built in each city.

Then came the seven years of famine, when the people could not get enough to eat, and they went to the king crying, What shall we do? He said, Go unto Joseph. What he says to you, do. Joseph opened the storehouses, which were full of corn, and had it sold to the people, making them glad and grateful.

Now this famine was not only in Egypt, but in all the countries round about,—even in Canaan, where Joseph's father and brothers lived. They began to be in want, and the father said: Behold! I have heard that there is plenty of corn in Egypt. Go down there and buy some, that we may live, and not die. And he sent them all there, save Benjamin, whom he kept at home, for he said, Some mischief might come to him.

So among those who bowed themselves down before Joseph, asking for corn, were his ten brothers. They had no idea that this great governor, dressed in fine robes with the gold chain around his neck, was the brother they had sold years before. But Joseph knew right away (although they had grown older) who those rough shepherds were from the vale of Hebron.

Oh, how they made him think of his home! He longed to ask a thousand questions,—if his father were alive, if Benjamin was well,—but first he wanted to find out whether they were sorry for what they had done to him. So he spoke roughly to them, and said, Whence come ye? From the land of Canaan to buy food, was the reply. Then Joseph said, Ye are spies come to see how ye can make war upon us. But the brothers said, Nay, my lord, but we are true men. We are no spies. We are twelve brothers, sons of our father. One is not (meaning Joseph), and the youngest is with our father in the land of Canaan. Joseph said, still roughly, You must prove this. You shall not leave the country until your youngest brother comes here. But, after keeping them in prison three days, he decided that all but Simeon should go home with the corn, and bring back Benjamin.

The brothers were in great distress when they heard this, and said to each other, This trouble has come upon us because we treated our brother so cruelly years ago, when we sold him.

Spake I not unto you, saying, Do not sin against the child, and ye would not hear? said Reuben. No wonder we are in trouble. They did not know Joseph could understand them, for he spoke in the Egyptian language. He pitied them as he listened, and turned away to hide his tears. He knew they were to be made glad by and by, but not yet. So he gave orders that their sacks should be filled with corn, and the money which they brought for pay should be put back in each sack, and that they should have food for the homeward journey.

On the way home, Judah, opening his sack to feed his donkey, found the money he had paid for the corn; and, when they reached home, and all emptied the sacks of corn, behold, in each brother's sack was the money which he had paid for it. Now they were afraid that some trick was being played upon them to get them into trouble; and, when Jacob heard their story, and learned that Simeon was left behind in prison, he grieved bitterly. Joseph is not, and Simeon is not, and ye will take Benjamin away. He shall not go down with you, for, if anything happens to him, then shall I never be happy again.

In vain the brothers pleaded. Reuben declared he would surely bring him home again, and Judah said he would bear the blame forever if Benjamin came not back. Not until they had eaten all the corn did the poor old father consent. If it must be so, he said, take a present of fruit and balm and honey, nuts, spices, and myrrh,—all we can spare from our little store,—and take twice as much money as before. May the governor be merciful to us! So with many last words of advice the brothers set out for Egypt again.

XIII. A Family Reunion.

A wise son makeith a glad father.—PROVERBS x. 1.

Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good.—ROMANS xii. 21.

When the ten brothers came back to Egypt, Joseph sent word for them to dine with him. Here was something else to worry about! Why should they be invited to the great man's house if not to be accused of taking money that did not belong to them? With the extra pay their father told them to take clutched in their hands, they questioned the steward at the door of the palace, but he said very kindly, Peace be to you. Fear not. I returned your money to you. Then he brought Simeon to them, and fetched water to bathe their dusty feet, and had their asses fed. So they unpacked their little store of nuts and honey and spices, curiously gazing about at the beautiful court-yard and gardens of the palace, filled with fruit-trees and flower beds, at the walls covered with paintings, and at the big storerooms stacked with good things to eat.

At noon the governor came home, and into his grand reception-room they went, bearing their presents and bowing low to the ground. He seemed pleasant now, and said, Is your father well, the old man of whom ye spake? Is he yet alive? Then he lifted up his eyes and saw Benjamin, his youngest brother, and said: Is this the young brother of whom ye spake unto me? God be gracious unto thee, my son. Oh, how he longed to throw his arms about him! He almost burst out crying right before them, and had to go quickly to his room, so they would not see him. Still, he decided to wait for one more trial of their goodness before telling them who he was. Washing away the traces of tears upon his face, he came back, and said to the servants, Set on the dinner.

So they sat down to eat, Joseph at a table by himself, as a ruler could not eat with his subjects; his family at another table, as they would not eat with strangers; and the brothers at a table in the order of their ages,—Reuben the oldest, then

Simeon, Judah, Levi, and so on down to Benjamin. They wondered much at this; for who could possibly know how old each one was? They also wondered when they saw the governor send five times as much food from his own table to Benjamin as to any of the others. However, this did not disturb them much, for all of them were well served, and they forgot their troubles, and ate and drank, and were merry together.

As soon as it was light the next morning, they set out for home, thinking of the good time they had had and how pleased the father would be to hear all about it. Now came the last and greatest trial of all. Joseph, perhaps to see how they would treat Benjamin, told his steward to again put back into the sacks the money which was paid for the corn, and also to put his own magic silver cup into Benjamin's sack, then to overtake them and accuse them of stealing it.

The steward did so, and told the brothers to stop. When the brothers heard the reason why, they declared they had taken nothing. Whoever has done this, let him die, and we will be thy slaves if the cup be found with us, they said. The sacks were opened and emptied, one by one, beginning with that of Reuben, the oldest. When Benjamin's was reached, there, in the midst of the corn, lay the silver cup. The poor brothers did not know what to do. With sobs and tears they loaded up their asses once more, and back they went to Egypt, straight to Joseph's house, throwing themselves on the ground before him. What deed did ye do? Knew ye not I would find it out? said Joseph very sternly, to them. How can we clear ourselves? Judah answered. God has found we are wicked men. Take us as thy slaves. Not so, said Joseph, only the one in whose sack the cup was found shall be my slave.

Then the noble Judah spoke up and told the whole story: of their leaving home; of the fears of their father, who mourned for his wife Rachel and his son Joseph; of his unwillingness to let Benjamin leave home, and how he, Judah, promised to bring him back safely. Take me instead as thy slave, and let the lad go home with the rest, he pleaded.

Now at last Joseph believed fully in the goodness of his brothers. He sent his servants from the room, and said to his brothers, I am Joseph, your brother, whom ye sold into Egypt. Seeing their looks of astonishment, he repeated, Come nearer. I am Joseph. Do not be sorry or vexed any longer that ye sold me, for God did send me here to preserve your life. His guiding hand has been in it all. Haste ye, and go up to my father, and say unto him, Thus saith Joseph, thy son, God hath made me lord of all Egypt. Come down unto me and tarry not, and thou shalt dwell in the land of Goshen, and thou shalt be near unto me, thou and thy children's children, and thy flocks and thy herds and all that thou hast.

This third and last time that the brothers set out for Canaan, they took wagons with them to bring the aged father and their wives and children back to Egypt. They had ten asses laden with good things to eat, and ten more loaded with corn and meat and bread for their families to use on the return journey, besides fine clothes to wear. See that ye do not quarrel on the way were Joseph's parting words.

As they neared home, they saw their father watching and waiting for them. How thankful he was to have his sons safely back again! But when he heard their story, saw the wagons and food and clothing, and heard that Joseph was really alive, he almost fainted for joy.

There was but little delay in starting back. Jacob did not forget to thank God, and he dreamed that God said to him, Fear not to go down into Egypt, for I will make of thee a great nation. As they drew near Goshen, where they were to stay, Joseph came to meet them in his splendid chariot, and when he saw his father, he fell on his neck and wept as a child.

He lived to enjoy many years with his dearest son. The king gave the brothers the best of the land for their pastures. One day Joseph brought his father to see the king. Pharaoh said to him very kindly, How old art thou? And Jacob replied, The days of my pilgrimage are an hundred and thirty years and he blessed Pharaoh.

Thus after many trials this family were united.

XIV. The Child in the Bulrushes.

Moses was instructed in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, and he was mighty in his words and works.—ACTS vii. 22.

We pass now from stories of the patriarchs to those of certain leaders of the Hebrews in their struggles and strife with other peoples and about whom still more wonderful things are told. We are to think of these simply as wonder-tales told long after the heroes lived when the facts about their lives were forgotten. They present persons and events as seen through a mist of glory which an adoring imagination had cast over them.

We have learned that Joseph's father, Jacob, and all his brothers, with their wives and children, came to live with him in Egypt. Years went by, and many more children were born until there came to be a whole nation of people who, though living in a part of Egypt, were Hebrews. We learned something about the king who was kind to Joseph and his family; but after his death new kings came to the throne, who did not remember anything about them. Instead of being glad because there were so many Hebrews, they were displeased, for they thought, if there should ever be a war, they would outnumber their own people and perhaps fight against them.

So they treated them very unkindly, and when there was any hard work to be done, such as building city walls or brick storehouses for grain or tall monuments, they made the poor Hebrews do it. They put taskmasters, as they were called, over them to make them work harder. It was more difficult to build in those days than now, when we have different kinds of machinery. All the bricks had to be carried in their hands or in yokes on their backs. They had to carry water also from the river Nile, in great stone jars, to water the ground, for the country was often very dry.

Then, as if this was not enough, king Pharaoh said that all boy-babies must not be allowed to grow up to be men. It would be better to throw them into the river to drown. We

cannot understand how any one could say such a cruel thing, but we must remember that it was a long time ago, and people did not have as good a chance as we have to learn what is right.

There was living in one of the cities at this time a Hebrew family,—Amram, the father, Jochebed, the mother, and two children, Aaron and Miriam. Then, to their joy, another boy-baby was born into the home. His mother grieved bitterly at the thought of parting with him. At night she would lie awake, thinking how she could manage to keep him. He was a strong, beautiful baby. She put off day after day telling the king's officers of his birth, until at last he grew so big and strong she could hide him no longer.

When he was three months old, she decided to carry out a plan she had made with the hope of saving his life. She picked some strong reeds, or rushes, that grew by the river-side, and wove them in and out, fashioning them into a sort of covered basket. This she rubbed over with pitch, and let it dry in the sun so the water could not get into it. Tenderly, then, she kissed her dear baby, laid him in the basket, and placed it in the tall rushes where it could float on the shallow water and yet not tip over or get away. Then she sent her little daughter Miriam to stay where she could watch it and see what happened. She thought somebody might see the basket, and the baby inside would look so lovely it would not be left to die.

Miriam did just as her mother told her. She loved her baby brother, too, and did not want any harm to come to him. So she patiently stood on the river bank, not far away, hardly daring to take her eyes off of him.

She had not long to wait; for who should come down to the river to bathe but the beautiful daughter of the king, gorgeous in her robes and jewels, and attended by her maidens. They spied the queer-looking basket, and were curious to see what was in it. How surprised they were when they opened it to see the chubby baby, who doubled up his fists and cried with all his might when they looked at him!

He was so pretty the princess said she would like to have him for her own. But how could she keep him? She called

her maidens to her, and said, What shall I do? This is one of the Hebrews' children. Yet I cannot leave him here alone. As she stood with the baby in her arms, Miriam, who had been waiting for the right moment, came running up to her, and said in a very polite way, Shall I go and call to thee a nurse of the Hebrew women, that she may nurse the child for thee? The king's daughter looked at the beseeching little face, and said, Go.

Oh, how swiftly Miriam ran to where her mother was waiting at a safe distance, to tell her the good news! How happy the mother was when the princess handed her her own baby, saying, Take this child away and nurse it for me, and I will give thee thy wages. Little did she know that the mother wanted no pay, for, of course, she did not dare tell the princess who she was. We may be sure she took good care of him, and not only tried to make him strong and healthy, but wise and good. She told him, when he was old enough to understand, about Abraham and Jacob and Joseph, and, when he listened to the stories about the way God helped them and of their trust in Him, he also wanted to be a helper to his people. For he pitied them as he saw them living in little mud-baked huts, and working so hard and long that they hardly had a chance to sleep or keep clean, while the Egyptians had nothing to do but to eat and drink, wear fine clothes, and enjoy themselves.

When he was older, he went to live at the king's palace, and was as a son to the princess, who called him Moses, for she said, I drew him out of the water.

But, while he was treated as a king's son and had the best of everything, and was instructed in the wisdom of the Egyptians, he never forgot his mother or his sister Miriam or brother Aaron or his people, and we shall see how he helped them.

XV. The Wonderful Bush.

Put off thy shoes from off thy feet, for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground.—EXODUS iii. 5.

Do you remember that Moses was not quite happy, although he lived in a king's palace as the son of a princess? He had a beautiful home,—a great building, with the walls decorated in blue and gold and red, dainty food served in silver and gold dishes, chariots to ride in, and slaves to wait upon him.

One might think he would try to forget that he was a Hebrew, like the slaves about him, and not the son of an Egyptian princess, and have as little to do with them as possible. But he was not that kind of a man. The love of his own people and the teachings of his mother about her religion were always in his heart. The Egyptians all about him bowed down to queer images. Some of them had the body of a man and the head of a bird, some the body of a lion or other animal and the head of a woman. Live animals, too, were worshiped, as cats or crocodiles or bulls; but they did not seem sacred to him, because he had been taught to worship a God whose home was in the sky.

One day, as he was out walking, he saw a cruel taskmaster beating a poor old Hebrew. Moses asked him to stop, and he would not do so, but only beat him harder than ever. Then Moses was so indignant he struck the taskmaster a heavy blow, and he fell to the ground. People near by saw this. Pharaoh heard of it, and, to save his own life, Moses left the palace and the great city, and went away to a country place called Midian.

Here we find him without home or friends or any one to wait upon him, just as poor as those he had so often pitied. As he sat by a well one day, resting and thinking what he should do, seven sisters came to the well to draw water for their father's sheep. But no sooner did they fill the trough than some rough shepherds came and drove the sheep away. Of course, Moses came to their rescue. He was always ready

to defend the weak, and he drove the men off and helped the sisters so much that they reached home sooner than their father Jethro thought they would. When they were questioned by him, they told him how an Egyptian had driven the shepherds away and what he had done for them. Where is he? Call him, that he may eat bread with us, said their father.

So Moses came to that humble home, and they asked him to stay with them. After a while he married one of the seven sisters, and there he might have spent the rest of his life, if he had forgotten the suffering people in Egypt. But all the time he kept thinking about his early home, and he longed to help his people.

One day, as usual, he was tending his flocks in a lonely part of the country near a high mountain, when he saw a bush on fire, yet it did not burn up, but the branches and twigs and leaves and bright blossoms kept just the same. He said, I will now turn aside and see this great sight, why this bush is not burned. As he did so, a voice seemed to call to him from out the bush. It said, Moses, Moses, and he replied, Here am I. Do not come any nearer, put off thy shoes from thy feet, for the place where thou standest is holy ground, the voice said.

Then, as Moses stood in astonishment, the voice went on to say, I am the God of thy father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. And Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look upon God. And the Lord told him it was time that the poor sorrowing Hebrews in Egypt should leave that country and go to a better one, where there was plenty of milk and honey and good things to eat, and that Moses should go back to Egypt and ask the new king to let the people go.

When he heard this, Moses said, How can I do such a great thing, and who shall I tell them sent me? Then the voice said: *I am that I am.* Tell them your God, *I am*, has sent you. Gather the elders and officers together, and tell them this. Moses said, I know they will not believe me nor listen to my voice. They will say, the Lord has not sent you. What is that you have in your hand? the Lord said. A rod, Moses replied, as he held up his shepherd's staff. Put it down upon

the ground, was the command. Moses did so, and it turned into a serpent. When he saw this, he was afraid, and ran from it, but the Lord said unto him, Put out your hand and take it by the tail. Moses caught it by the tail, and it became a rod again.

Even with this magic rod to show the people, Moses hesitated, and said he did not know how to talk well to people to make them do as he wanted them to. But the Lord told him to go, and He would teach him what to say; that Aaron, his brother, would hear that he was coming back, and would be glad. So Moses said no more, but opened his eyes, slipped on his shoes, took his staff, called together his sheep, and very silently and thoughtfully drove them home, thinking of the great work before him. God had called him, and he must obey.

The next day he set out with his wife and children, his shepherd life behind him, that of a great leader before him. His brother Aaron met him on the way, and was glad to see him, as the Lord said he would be, and they kissed each other, and talked over their plans. Then they gathered the elders together, and Aaron told the people all that the Lord had spoken to Moses, and showed them the magic rod. And the people believed, and bowed their heads and worshiped.

After that Moses and Aaron went to the palace, that same palace where Moses had lived as a little boy, and asked to see the king. They begged him to let the Hebrews go into the desert three days to worship their God. The king was very angry, and said, Why do you want to take the people away from their works? You want to give them a chance to rest, but we need them, and they shall work more instead of less.

So he told the taskmasters to say to the people they must make as many bricks as they were then doing, and also get the straw themselves. The poor Hebrews had to hunt in the fields to gather stubble, and, after taking all that time, make just as many bricks as they did when the straw was given to them, and, when they did not do so, they were beaten.

XVI. A People Set Free.

I will sing unto the Lord, for he hath triumphed gloriously.
EXODUS xv. 1.

In the last lesson we learned that Pharaoh would not let the Hebrews leave his country. Moses was discouraged, and asked God why He had sent him to free his people, for they were worse off than if he had not spoken to Pharaoh. But the Lord told him to remember the rod which He had given him, that he must ask Pharaoh again and again to let them go, that his rod would do such wonders and bring such troubles to the Egyptians that everybody, even Pharaoh, would see what a mighty God the Hebrew God is.

Moses and Aaron did as the Lord said. They came before Pharaoh and put their rod on the ground, and, as at Midian, it turned into a serpent. Pharaoh's magicians had magic rods that became serpents also, but Moses's rod ate up theirs. Then Moses waved his rod over the river, and the water turned into blood. No one could drink it, and all the fish died. The Egyptian magicians did the same thing. Then he waved it over the river-banks, and frogs came hopping out of the river into people's houses, into chambers and beds, into the kitchens and baking-ovens. This the king's magicians did also.

Next Moses waved his wand over the dust of the streets, and it turned into insects. This last trick the court magicians could not do, and they advised Pharaoh to let the Hebrews go; but he would not listen to them. So swarms of flies came into the palace as well as into the huts of the poor people. Then sheep and cattle died. After this the Egyptians were ill. Next came big hail-storms with thunder and lightning. When they passed, swarms of locusts appeared, and ate every green thing left from the storm. This was followed by a dense darkness. The Egyptians could not see each other nor move from one place to another.

Pharaoh suffered from these plagues, and every now and then would send for Moses and Aaron, and almost decide to

let the people go. But, as soon as the trouble was over, his heart grew hard again, and he would say they must stay. Once he told them the men could go, but not the children; and, again, that the children might go, but not the flocks and herds.

After these plagues the oldest child in every Egyptian family suddenly died, the king's son among the rest, while the Hebrew children escaped. Because the angel of death thus passed over their homes, letting their children live, the Hebrews had a feast, which they called the Passover, and celebrated every year thereafter. When Pharaoh saw what happened to the children, he could endure no more troubles. He did not wait till morning, but sent for Moses and Aaron, and said to them: Rise up, and get you forth from among my people, both of you, and all the Israelites. Go and serve the Lord as you asked to do. Take your flocks and herds, and leave me your blessing. The Egyptians also urged them to hurry from among them, for they said, If you stay longer, we shall all die.

Then what a great uprising there was among the Hebrews! They could not stop to cook food for the journey, but baked their bread-dough half risen, and bound the troughs in which it was mixed on their shoulders. They borrowed clothes and gold and silver from the Egyptians, and then joyfully set forth,—a great multitude, going they knew not whither.

Moses led them southward at first, that he might keep away from warlike tribes encamped near by. He knew that God was guiding him, for, as they moved on, there was a pillar of cloud that went before them by day which became a pillar of fire by night. Following this, they could not go astray.

Once, at the close of a day's march, they camped by the shore of a big sea. How good it seemed to rest after the tiresome journey! The little children, who had set out so merrily, found it hard to hold up their sleepy heads. They were getting well settled, when, looking back across the way they had come, they saw chariots in the distance. As these drew nearer, they saw that they were pursued by Pharaoh and his army. Yes, when he found they had really gone and that he would have no one to do his work, he was sorry again that he had let them go. And here he was to see if he could make them turn back.

Then how the people cried out to Moses, saying: Why did you bring us out of Egypt? Didn't we tell you, when we were there, that it would be better for us if you let us alone? Now we are to be killed in the wilderness when we might have lived in Egypt. Do you suppose Moses was afraid? The Lord shall fight for you, and you shall hold your peace, he said. For he heard God's voice telling him that no harm should come to them, that he must lift up his rod and go forward.

As he finished speaking, the pillar of cloud that was before them went behind them and stood still, hiding the Egyptians from them. It grew so thick and black on the side towards the Egyptians they could not see to come nearer, but toward the Hebrews it was light as day. Then a strong east wind came up and blew all night, so that, when the tide went out, the sands of the sea became dry and hard. The Hebrews quietly crossed over in safety to the other side.

After they were over, the wind changed and blew a gale, the tide turned, and the next morning, when the Egyptians followed, their heavy chariot wheels sank in the damp sand and they could not move. The big waves came rushing in and dashed over the host, and they were drowned.

How happy the Hebrews were to escape! They all shouted and sang for joy! They believed that Moses was, after all, a true leader, and that God was with him and would protect them. All the men sang a song of praise, and Miriam and all the women joined them, playing upon their timbrels and dancing. This is part of the song they sang:

I will sing unto the Lord, for He hath triumphed gloriously.
 The horse and his rider hath He thrown into the sea.
 The Lord is my strength and my song.
 Pharaoh's chariots and his host hath He cast into the sea.
 Thou didst blow with Thy wind, the sea covered them.
 The Lord shall reign for ever and ever.

XVII. Troubles in the Wilderness.

Thou hast guided them in Thy strength unto Thy holy habitation.—EXODUS xv. 13.

The Hebrews were safely over the Red Sea, and full of joy and thanksgiving. But their escape from Pharaoh and his army was only the first danger and trouble they had to face. They found themselves in a bare, rocky land called The Wilderness, where food and water were scarce, and it was hard to travel under a burning sun, hungry and thirsty.

Instead of being patient and looking forward to the country before them, they kept thinking of the homes they had left. They soon forgot how much they had suffered there. They blamed Moses for taking them away. If they were thirsty, they came near stoning him, asking him why he had led them and their children and their cattle into a country to die of thirst. If they were hungry, they grumbled and complained, and said, oh, how we wish we had some of the fish and cucumbers, the melons and onions, such as we had at home!

Moses was on the watch all the time for food and water. Once, when they came to a clear spring at a place called Marah, they could not drink the water it was so bitter, but he cut down a tree near by and put it into the spring, which made the water sweet and good. At another time, when they came to a large rock, he struck it with his rod, and water gushed forth. He also taught them to gather a white gum that dropped from the bushes to the ground at night. They called it "manna," which in their language means "What-is-it?" It was sweet like honey, and they ground it up, made it into cakes, and baked it. Great flocks of quails, too, flew close to the earth, and they beat them down for food.

Moses was very patient with them, for he knew they had been slaves so long they did not know how to behave. But sometimes he felt discouraged, and asked God why He laid such a burden upon him, they acted so much like crying babies.

Once, when they were attacked by some warlike tribes called

Amalekites, he chose a brave young soldier, Joshua by name, of whom we shall hear more by and by, to lead the people against them. Then, he said, I will stand on the top of the hill with the rod of God in my hand. When the people looked up and saw him holding the rod high above his head, they felt brave and fought well. But, if he grew tired and let his arms fall, they lost their courage and came near being defeated. So Aaron and another man named Hur fixed a stone seat for Moses, and they stood one on each side and held his hands up, so that the people could see the rod all the time. Then the people fought so bravely that they were able to drive the fierce tribes away.

But the Hebrews were themselves their worst enemy. They did not know how to live peaceably together, and many were the quarrels and disputes that Moses had to settle. He felt that he must do what he thought God had long wanted him to do—that is, think out some laws to guide the people—for he knew, if they were ever to be a strong, holy nation, one of God's "treasures," they must know and do the right. It had been some months now since they left Egypt, and when they came to a place near a mountain called Sinai, where there was plenty of grass and water and where it was safe to stay, he decided to have them pitch their tents and rest.

Then he called the people together, and told them how God had brought them safely out of Egypt as if they had been on eagles' wings, and that they must obey the laws God was going to give them. And they said, All the Lord speakest to us, that will we do. Moses told them he was going up the big mountain near by to get these laws, and they must not follow him. They watched him as he slowly climbed the side of the mountain, until he was lost in the clouds.

Soon after he left them there was a heavy thunder-storm. When they saw the black clouds like smoke settle on the mountain, heard the thunder crash among the peaks, and saw the lightning flashing as if the mountain were on fire, they said that was the way God came down to give the laws. The priests blew their trumpets, and the people were afraid and ran some distance away. But Moses did not fear.

He went many times up the mountain, sometimes taking others with him. Once, when he stayed longer than usual, the people got discouraged, and said to Aaron, Up, make us gods that shall go before us; but, as for this man Moses, we don't know what has become of him.

Now Aaron knew better than to do this, but they were so anxious to have something which they could see to worship, such as the Egyptians had, that he told them, if they would take the gold rings from the ears of their wives and daughters and give them to him, he would make for them a little golden calf.

This was done, and early the next morning they gathered about it, worshiping it and offering sacrifices. They had a great feast with music and dancing. As they were in the midst of their merry-making, whom should they see coming down the mountain-side, carrying the slabs of stone on which the laws or commandments were written, but Moses! When he drew near the camp, Joshua, who was with him, said, There is a noise of war in the camp. Moses listened, and said, It is not the voice of them that shout for victory or the sound of them who are beaten,—no, it is singing that I hear. As he came in sight of the people and saw them dancing before the idol, he was so angry that he threw the stone tablets on the ground so hard that they were broken.

He had been away for many lonely days to get those laws, and here were these foolish people he was trying to help dancing before the image of a calf! He seized the calf, threw it into the fire, and said to Aaron, What did the people say to you that you should do such a foolish thing? Aaron replied, Do not be so angry. You know the people are set on mischief. They told me to make them gods, so I just put their gold ornaments into the fire, and they came out the shape of a calf.

But Moses would not let them off without severe punishment, for he would have them know that the gods of Egypt were not the gods of Israel. When he had put some to the sword and prayed for the rest, he went up the mountain again.

XVIII. The Ten Words.

Therefore shall ye lay up these my words in your heart and in your soul, . . . and ye shall teach them to your children.—

DEUTERONOMY xi. 18, 19.

We remember that Moses was very angry and broke the stone tablets on which the laws were written, so that he had to cut some smooth slabs out of the rocks again and go up the mountain a second time. He went alone as before; and, as a great cloud settled over the mountain, he heard God's voice, and fell on his face and worshiped. When he came down, after being there a long time, the skin of his face shone so that the people were almost afraid to come near him. He had to put a veil over it while he read to them these commandments, or Ten Words, as they are sometimes called:

1. I am the Lord thy God: thou shalt have no other gods before me.
2. Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image.
3. Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain.
4. Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy.
5. Honor thy father and thy mother.
6. Thou shalt not kill.
7. Thou shalt not commit adultery.
8. Thou shalt not steal.
9. Thou shalt not bear false witness.
10. Thou shalt not covet.

After these laws were given, a beautiful tent called the "Tent of Meeting" was made, in which to worship, instead of using a rude mound of stones such as the patriarchs used. Moses asked all who would bring their most beautiful things for it with a willing heart to do so, and so much was brought that it was not long before he had to send word to them not to bring any more, as there was more than enough. Every morning the people came to him, bringing their gold bracelets and rings; every man who had skins of animals dyed red brought them for the top of the tent; all the women that were wise-hearted did spin with their hands and brought that which they had spun,—

blue and purple and scarlet and fine linen cloth,—which was used for curtains for the side of the tent.

Some brought silver and brass and fine wood: others brought spices and oil, for there was an altar on which spices were burned and a table covered with golden dishes, and a tall golden candlestick in which candles were always kept burning. But most important of all in this tabernacle was a chest, or ark, as it was called, made of wood overlaid with pure gold, inside of which the stone slabs on which the laws were written were put. On top of this ark were two gold angels, or cherubim, with outstretched wings, and between them a mercy seat where God could meet Moses.

Aaron was chosen priest, and he had a long coat and scarf and girdle richly embroidered. Around the hem of the coat were little bells that tinkled when he walked, while on his head he wore a sort of crown, or mitre, on which were the words, Holiness to the Lord.

It took a long time to make this tent with these beautiful things in it, but, when finished, Moses had it set up a little distance from the camp. Whenever he went into it, the people stood in the doors of their tents and watched him. They saw the cloud in the form of a pillar stop over the tent, and they said, God met him there and talked to him face to face, as one man talks to another.

Then Moses decided they must go on nearer to the Promised Land. When they started on the march, the cloud rose from the tent and kept in front of them. Following this cloud, they journeyed on from place to place. Sometimes the king or chief of a country would not let them pass through, so they had to go around a longer way. At last, however, they came near the borders of Canaan, and Moses decided to send twelve spies ahead to see just what kind of a country it was,—whether people lived in scattered tents or walled cities, whether the soil was rich or poor, and if there were plenty of wood and water.

These men set out climbing hills and crossing ravines until they came to a place called Eshcol. They saw great quantities of grapes there, just beginning to ripen, and many other kinds

of fruit, and decided it was just the kind of a place in which to live, if it were not for the fierce-looking people that dwelt there in cities with high walls about them. They were gone forty days, and Moses and all the people were getting quite impatient to hear about their adventures. There was much rejoicing when they were seen coming safely back.

Two of them had a staff between them; and what do you suppose was on it? A bunch of grapes. Yes, the bunches were so big it took two men to carry a single bunch. Besides grapes, there were bags filled with ripe and tender figs, while others had their arms full of pomegranates (a kind of orange) so juicy it made mouths water to look at them.

The people crowded around to hear their story; but, alas! their joy was turned to sorrow when the men began to speak. We saw a good land, they said, with plenty of milk and honey, but there are many cities with high stone walls about them, and such tall, strong men, so that we seemed like grasshoppers beside them. We should never dare to go near them, they added. One man, called Caleb, tried to quiet the others, and said: Let us go up at once, for we are able to possess it; but the other spies would not listen to him.

Moses and Aaron were now more discouraged than ever. Joshua and Caleb, the only two brave men among the spies, tried to encourage the others, saying, The land is an exceeding good land; we do not need to fear the people, God will help. But they turned away from the land which they were near, back into the wilderness. And, because they were cowardly, God made them wander forty years more from place to place.

When, finally, they did enter it, Joshua and Caleb were the only men among those who entered who were grown up when they left Egypt. Even Moses, who had been so patient and kind to them, did not live to get there. He called the people together, and told them to remember how good the Lord had been to them, that they must keep the commandments and always try to do the right; that Joshua would be their leader after he was gone. And then he climbed a mountain called Nebo, where he could see the land spread out before him in all its beauty, and died there alone with God.

XIX. The Fall of a City.

Be strong and of a good courage.—JOSHUA i. 9.

Just across the Jordan River from where the Hebrews were camping there stood in a plain a city called Jericho. Like most cities of that time, it had a high strong wall about it. Above it could be seen the flat roofs and towers of its buildings in a setting of palm-trees, of which there were so many it was sometimes called the City of Palms. Behind it rose high mountain ranges. It was this city which the Hebrews must take in order to stay in the Promised Land. Although their great leader, Moses, was dead, they did not fear, for they had the brave soldier Joshua to lead them.

He and Caleb were the only two grown men left of all those who left Egypt and the only two of the twelve spies who wanted to enter the land forty years before. Since then the voice of God had come to him many times, saying, *Be strong and of a great courage*, or, again, *Be not afraid*, neither be thou dismayed, for the Lord thy God is with thee wherever thou goest. Joshua told this to the people, and they believed him, and said, All that thou commandest us we will do, and whither thou sendest us we will go. Then Joshua told the officers of the army to go among the people and tell them to get ready, to cook food for the journey, and, when they saw the priests take up the ark and move, to follow at a little distance from it; for in three days they were to enter the land.

In the mean time he sent two men as spies into the city to find out all they could about it. These men came very near being discovered, and, if it had not been for a woman named Rahab, who hid them on the roof of her house, under some flax she was spinning, they might have been captured. She let them down from her window by a rope, and they escaped to the mountains, and so back across the river to Joshua. The city is as good as ours now, they said, for the people are ready to faint away at the sight of us.

Then they all joyfully started. The Jordan River was

running rapidly before them, but, when the priests bearing the ark walked down to the banks, the water stopped flowing, and they went safely across the dry bed of the river. Then they piled up stones to mark the place, and had a harvest feast. How good the corn tasted after the manna they had been eating so long! But Joshua's mind was not upon feasting. He walked out toward the city looming up before him, planning how it could be taken. Pretty soon he met a man with a sword in his hand. Joshua went boldly up to him, and said, Art thou for us or for our enemies? The man said, Nay, but as captain of the host of the Lord am I now come. Then Joshua knew that it was an angel who thus spoke, and bowed low before him. The angel had the same good news for him that the spies had. See, he said, the city gates are closed. No one dares to come out or to go in. They are already the same as given into thy hands. Then he told him of a plan to capture it, and this was the way Joshua carried it out.

He formed his army as if they were going to attack the walls, —first the armed soldiers, then seven priests carrying seven trumpets, after them more priests carrying the sacred ark, then the rest of the army. And Joshua commanded them, saying: Ye shall not shout, nor make any noise, nor speak until the day I bid ye shout. Then ye shall shout. So early the next morning they slowly marched once around the city making no sound save the blowing of the trumpets.

The second day they did the same thing, the people in the city looking out of their windows at them in surprise.

The third day they wound around the city as before, the people in the city not only surprised, but afraid. They had heard how the Hebrews' God helped them when they crossed the Red Sea, and that they had always been victorious in their battles, and here was that God in the ark coming close to them.

The fourth day, as Joshua's army made the circuit of the city, it seemed as if a spell was being woven about them.

The fifth day they were still wondering what they could do.

The sixth day there was no courage at all left in them.

Very early the seventh day that terrible procession began to march around the walls, and it kept on marching, not only once, but seven times. Then the trumpets blew harder than ever. Joshua called out, Shout, for the Lord hath given you the city. The people gave a mighty shout, the mountains echoed the sound, and it came to pass that the walls fell down flat, so they entered into the city and destroyed all that was in it, both man and beast. No, not all, for one house, had a scarlet cord hanging from the window, and that house they did not touch, for in it lived Rahab, the woman who saved the spies, and who was told to put it there, and was promised that she and her family would be spared.

After the fall of Jericho the Canaanites grew more and more afraid of these Hebrews. Those who did not fight tried to make peace. Once some men came to Joshua, wearing ragged clothes and dusty shoes. On the backs of their asses were old mended sacks and loaves of mouldy bread. They pretended they had come a great way, and asked him to sign a peace treaty with them. See this bread that we took hot from the oven when we started, they said, now it is dry and mouldy. See our ragged clothes and our shoes that were new when we set out. Surely, you will not fight countries as far off as ours. So the treaty was signed only for Joshua to find that these strangers were his neighbors. But what did they gain by this deceit? They were made slaves,—hewers of wood and drawers of water. No more peace treaties after that. Even with five kings against him Joshua never hesitated to fight, and once, when he wanted more time to finish an important battle, he said,

“Sun, stand thou still upon Gibeon,
And thou Moon in the valley of Ajalon.”

That long day the five kings were beaten.

XX. A Brave Band.

The Lord is with thee, thou mighty man of valor.—JUDGES vi. 12.

There lived in a little village of Ophrah, quite a long while after the Hebrews settled in Canaan, a young man whose name was Gideon. He was large and strong and willing to work; but, in spite of all he could do to help his father Joash, his family were very poor. They were not only poor, but lived in fear of their lives. They made caves or dens in the mountains near their homes, to which they could run when in danger, and their friends and neighbors did the same. Gideon worked early and late, raising crops in the fields or tending sheep and cattle or watering his grapevines, but, just as soon as the grain was ready to harvest, fierce wandering Arab tribes, or Midianites, as they were called, would come upon them and steal it, and carry away their flocks and herds.

These tribes lived in the desert across the Jordan River, and every once in a while they would fold their tents, drive the cattle before them, and with hundreds of camels would camp near the Israelites, ready to take the first chance at carrying off their belongings. This had been going on seven years, and the Israelites were pretty well discouraged. They did not dare to fight but would leave everything, and run for their lives to the caves or dens in the mountains they had made when their foes appeared.

One day Gideon was threshing wheat, trying to separate the kernels from the husks, in a little hollow place where grapes were pressed, hoping he would not be seen by the Midianites. He wasn't at all happy, for he was thinking what a hard life they were leading. He had heard ever since he was a little boy that he belonged to a chosen people. He knew how they had been led out of Egypt, fed with manna in the wilderness, and cared for all the way along. Was it for this they came into the Promised Land,—to live in poverty

and fear and hunger? He wondered why something could not be done to help them now.

Thinking thus, he looked up, and saw a beautiful angel sitting under a spreading oak-tree, who said unto him, The Lord is with thee, thou mighty man of valor. Gideon was not only surprised to see an angel, but to hear himself called a mighty man of valor, and he said: O my Lord, if that is so, why has all this trouble come upon us? Where are the wonders which our fathers told us of, saying to us, The Lord brought us up from Egypt? But now He has forsaken us, and given us to the Midianites.

The angel looked upon him, and said, Go in this thy might, and thou shalt save Israel from the hand of the Midianites. Gideon replied, O my Lord, how can I save Israel? My family is poor, and I am the youngest in it. And the angel said unto him, Surely I will be with thee, and thou shalt smite the host of the Midianites as if they were but one man.

It was all so new and strange to be talking to an angel that Gideon could hardly believe it. He said, If you really think I can do this, then show me some sign that thou talkest with me. Do not go, I pray thee, until I bring my gift to thee. And the angel said, I will tarry until thou come again. So Gideon went and cooked some meat, and brought it with the broth and some cakes to the angel. Put the meat and cakes upon this rock and pour the broth over them, said the angel. Gideon did so.

The angel touched the food with the end of a staff that he held in his hand, and, lo! fire rose up out of the rock and burned the food. Then the angel disappeared. Now Gideon was sure that he had seen an angel, and he said, Alas, O Lord God, I have seen an angel face to face, and he was afraid. But a voice answered: Peace be unto thee. Thou shalt not die.

With his thoughts full of this vision, Gideon began to take heart, and instead of just wishing something might be done as in the olden time he bravely set to work to do something himself. That very night he chose ten men to help him, and cut down an altar to an idol near by, and built one to God

in place of it. In the morning, when this was found out, all the neighbors gathered together, saying angrily, Who has done this? Gideon did it, the son of Joash, some said. Bring him out, that he may die, they told his father, but Joash said, Why doesn't your idol himself punish Gideon? If he be a god, he ought to take care of his own altar.

After that Gideon found his courage gaining. He blew his trumpet and sent messages throughout his tribe and to the tribes about him to come and fight the Midianites, and men came hurrying to him, first from one tribe and then another, glad that a leader had at last been found. When he saw them, his heart began to fail again. He felt ashamed to ask for any more signs from God. He did, however, ask Him to let a fleece of wool that he put on the ground stay dry when the ground was wet with dew, and again for it to be wet with dew when the ground was dry. When this was done for him, he hesitated no longer, but told the people to come together, ready for an early start the next morning.

And they came in such numbers that the field was full of them. What could he do with such an army? Many of them did not know anything about fighting. He looked them over, and said, Whoever is fearful and afraid, let him go home. How many do you think did so? Twenty-two thousand! Even after that there were ten thousand left. So he thought of a plan to send still more home. He brought them down to a brook that flowed through the valley, telling them they could drink, but that they must hurry. Then he watched them. Those who stopped to kneel down and drink he sent home, for he knew they would be too slow to attack the swift-moving Midianites, but those who caught up the water in the hollow of their hands, lapping it as a dog would lap, he kept.

There were three hundred of these, and with this small picked band he was ready to attack the host of the Midianites camping below him in the valley. It was now growing dark, and he drew near to see what they were doing. Then he crept softly down near one of the tents, and listened. He heard a man inside tell another of a curious dream he had had. He said he dreamed a loaf of barley bread tumbled

into one of their tents, and knocked it over. The other one said, That means the sword of Gideon is going to overturn all our tents.

That pleased Gideon, and he turned back and told the brave band that the Midianites had already lost their courage and victory would be sure. He divided his men into three companies, one hundred men in each company, gave each man a trumpet and a pitcher, inside of which was a torch, and told them to surround the camp. And he said, When I blow my trumpet, I and all that are with me, then blow ye your trumpets, and shout, The sword of the Lord and Gideon! Whatever I do, do ye the same.

So Gideon and the one hundred men that were with him marched in the middle of the night to the camp where the enemy was sleeping. They blew their trumpets with all their might, and broke their pitchers with a big crash, holding the torches that were inside up high. The other companies did the same, shouting, The sword of the Lord and Gideon!

Then there was a wild panic among the enemy. They were awakened suddenly as they heard a crashing and shouting and saw the lights on all sides of them. They did not know which way to turn, but drew their swords and struck out at each other. Many were beaten down, and those that escaped ran for their lives. But though Gideon was faint and tired, he kept on after them until the victory was complete.

XXI. A Strong Man.

Be strong in the Lord, and in the strength of His might.—
EPHESIANS vi. 10.

There were other enemies who troubled the Hebrews besides the Midianites or Arabs of the desert. The worst of these were the Philistines who lived by the great sea. They liked nothing better than to steal the Hebrews' crops and war-weapons; but they found their match in a person called Samson, who was said to be the strongest man that ever lived. It was told how an angel appeared to his mother, telling her that his hair must never be cut and that he should not drink anything stronger than water. This boy with the long golden hair must often have surprised his playmates with his feats of strength. When a young man, as he was going down to Timnath in the Philistine country one day, a young lion came out and roared at him, and would have killed him if he had not torn this prince of beasts to pieces with his hands.

Not long after this he was so angry with the Philistines that he caught three hundred foxes, tied their tails together in pairs, put a burning torch between each pair, and sent them into the wheat fields of the enemy. It was harvest time, and the crops were waiting to be gathered. The foxes rushed all over the fields in mad terror, and all the wheat and rye were burned, also the vineyards on the hillsides, and groves of olive-trees.

Oh, how angry the Philistines were! To get even with him, some of them came up and burned Samson's house. Then he slew many of them, and afterward ran and hid in the mountains.

By this time his own countrymen were frightened, for the Philistines came and pitched their tents close to them. Why are ye come up against us? they asked. And the Philistines answered, To bind Samson are we come up, and to do to him as he hath done to us.

Then three thousand men of his tribe went to the rock where Samson had hid, and said to him, Didn't you know the

Philistines have come upon us because of what you did to them? Why did you do this? Samson answered, As they did to me, so have I done to them. They said, We have come to bind you, that we may deliver you into the hand of the Philistines.

Promise me you will not try to kill me yourselves? said Samson. They replied, No, we will bind you fast and give you to them, but we will not kill you. So they bound him with two strong cords, and took him to the Philistine camp. The Philistines shouted for joy when they saw him coming to them, bound; but their joy was quickly turned to sorrow, for Samson with one big effort snapped the cords that were around him as though they were no stronger than burned threads, and, after killing many of them, got away.

But the Philistines did not give up trying to capture him, and once, when he was in one of their walled cities, they locked the gates, and thought he was surely theirs. But, when they were all asleep one night, Samson pulled up the gates, posts and all, and carried them off on his shoulders to the side of a mountain near by.

Soon after this they laid another plan to capture him, for they had discovered that he loved one of their number, a woman named Delilah. If you will find out what makes him so strong, they said to her, we will pay you eleven thousand pieces of silver, for we want to punish him.

Now, if Delilah had really loved Samson, she would never have listened to these men. But she deceived him, and made him think that she loved him. One day she said to him in a coaxing way, Tell me, I pray thee, what is there strong enough to bind you? Samson replied, If I am bound with seven green withes that were never dried, then I shall be as weak as any other man. So she bound him with seven green withes that had not been dried, and, to see if he was really weak, she tried to frighten him, and cried, O Samson, the Philistines are upon thee! Samson started up, and broke the withes as easily as if they were burned threads. Then Delilah said, Oh, you were mocking me. You told me lies. Now tell me truly, Is there anything strong enough to bind you?

Samson said, If they bind me with new ropes that have never

been used, I shall be as weak as any other man. Then Delilah took new ropes and bound him fast, and tried the same way as before to see if what he said was true. She left him, and soon came hurrying back, crying: O Samson, the Philistines are upon thee! And he started up, and broke the ropes as if they were but threads.

But she tried once more: You have twice mocked me and told me lies, Samson. Now won't you tell me truly how you can be bound so that you cannot get away? Samson said, If thou weavest the seven locks of my hair in the loom as threads are woven, they will hold me fast. Delilah did so. She wove them in and out and under and over, and fastened them to the weaving-frame with a large wooden pin; and he went to sleep. Then she shouted, The Philistines are upon thee! And Samson awakened, and ran out of the room, taking the weaving-frame, pin-beam and all, with him.

Even then Delilah did not give up trying to find out the secret of his strength. She wanted that eleven thousand pieces of silver. She told him she was sure he did not really love her with his whole heart, for he had mocked her three times. She gave him no peace, but coaxed and begged; at last, he was so unhappy that he thought there was not much use in living. So he told her the truth, that, if his head was shaved, his strength would go from him, and he would be as weak as any other man.

When Delilah heard this, she quickly told the Philistines what he said, and they paid her the money. When Samson was sound asleep, they took a razor and shaved his head. Then she shouted, The Philistines are upon thee, Samson! He waked up, and thought, I will go shake myself free, but alas! he could not get away. The Philistines put out his eyes, bound him, and set him to work in prison.

But they forgot that his hair would grow again; and once, when many thousands of them were having a great feast to their god Dagon in a temple, they sent for Samson, that they might make sport of him. Samson whispered to the boy who was leading him, Let me feel the pillars of this house, that I may lean on them. Then he prayed, O Lord God, remem-

ber me, I pray Thee, and strengthen me only this once, O God, that I may be avenged of the Philistines for my two eyes. And he took hold of the two middle pillars that supported the temple, one with the right hand and the other with the left, bowed himself with all his might, and, lo! the temple fell over, and all the people were killed, he himself with the rest.

XXII. The Gleaner.

Entreat me not to leave thee; for whither thou goest, I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge; thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God.—RUTH i. 16.

In the country of Moab there lived a young woman named Ruth. With her were her husband's mother, Naomi, a widow, and a sister-in-law, Orpah. They were very happy together until a great sorrow came to them. Ruth's husband died, and shortly after Orpah's also. So here were three lonely women living together with no one to care for them.

At last Naomi, the mother, decided to go back to her old home among her friends in Judah, which she and her husband had left several years before because there was a famine there. Ruth and Orpah, who had never been there, said they would go with her, and take care of her. But Naomi said, No, return each of you to your mother's house. The Lord deal kindly with you, as ye have dealt with the dead and with me. Then she kissed them, but they both began to cry, and said, Surely, we will go with thee unto thy people. She answered, It is not best that you should go with me, much as I would like to have you do so.

Still crying, Orpah kissed her mother-in-law, and went back to her own people; Ruth clung to Naomi saying, Entreat me not to leave thee, or to return from following after thee; for whither thou goest, I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge; thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God. Then Naomi did not urge her any more to stay behind, when she saw how great was her love. So these two went on together, leaving the mountains of Moab and passing through the Jordan valley to the little town of Bethlehem in the green uplands of Judah. Naomi went at once to some of her old friends, who gladly welcomed her. How changed she seemed since she left them ten years before! Is this Naomi? they said. Call me not Naomi (pleasant), was the reply, call

me Mara (bitterness) instead, for my life has been very sad since I left you.

True love shows itself in helpful deeds as well as words, and it was not long before Ruth gave proof of her devotion. It was the harvest time. In those days it was the custom to let the poor people of the village come each day and gather up the scattered ears that did not happen to be bound up in the sheaves after the grain was cut down by the reapers. Those who thus followed after the laborers were called gleaners. It was tiresome work, bending over in the hot sun to pick the ears from the stubble, and often the gleaners were rudely treated; but Ruth knew that Naomi must be provided for in some way, and she was ready to do anything that she could for her. So she asked if she could go and find a field in which to glean. Go, my daughter, said Naomi.

By good fortune she came to a field belonging to a rich man, named Boaz, and there she began to glean. That same day Boaz came to see how the reapers were getting on. The Lord be with you, he said; and they answered, The Lord bless thee. He soon noticed the young and beautiful woman bending patiently at her task. Who is this? he asked the overseer. It is the damsel who came back with Naomi out of the country of Moab, was the answer. She asked me to let her glean after the reapers among the sheaves, and she has worked steadily since morning.

When Boaz heard this, he came to Ruth, and told her he hoped she would glean in his fields every day, and not go elsewhere, that no one should harm her, and, if she was thirsty, she must go to the pitchers of water which the men had filled, and drink. Ruth bowed very low on hearing these kind words, and said, Why have I found grace in thine eyes, that thou dost notice me, since I am a stranger? Boaz answered, It hath been shown me all thou hast done for thy mother-in-law since the death of thy husband, how thou hast left thy father and thy mother and thy native land, and art come to a strange people. The Lord reward thee, under whose wings thou art come to take refuge. Ruth bowed low again, and told him how much his words comforted her. Boaz asked her

to take her noonday meal with them, and saw that she had plenty to eat. Let fall some handfuls of barley on purpose for her, he said to his men, so that she may have all that she wants.

We may be sure that it was a happy though tired young woman who hurried home that evening to Naomi. She showed her what a quantity of barley she had gleaned, and told her all that had happened. When she said that the man who owned the field was Boaz, Naomi joyfully exclaimed: Blessed be the Lord, who has not left off His kindness to the living and the dead. The man is one of our kinsmen. So Ruth gleaned in his field with the maidens day after day. The more Boaz saw her, the more he thought of her goodness and beauty. She, too, thought over and over how good and kind he was to her.

When the harvest season was passed, Boaz went and sat by the gate of the city, and called together ten elders, saying, Ho! turn aside, sit ye down here. Then he told them he wished to make Ruth, the Moabitess, his wife; and, to prove his right and interest, he took off his shoe before them, and gave it to a relative of Naomi's. They all said: We are witnesses. May thy wife be unto thee as Rachel and Leah, and may you be famous in Bethlehem.

So Boaz took Ruth for his wife.

And the little baby that came to that home, who was tenderly cared for by Naomi, the grandmother, was called Obed, and, it is said that he became the grandfather of David, the great Hebrew king, of whom we shall hear later.

XXIII. A Voice in the Night.

And the child grew on, and was in favor both with the Lord and also with men.—I SAMUEL ii. 26.

In old Hebrew times there lived a beautiful little boy named Samuel. We do not know how he looked, but we are quite sure he had large dark eyes, waving hair, a clear olive skin, and that he was a cheerful, happy little fellow. He lived in a different way from other children, for, instead of being at home with his father and mother, he was separated from them, and lived in the temple where the ark was kept and where the priests offered sacrifices to God. You remember Moses had an ark, or wooden chest, made in which to keep the Commandments when the people were wandering in the wilderness. This ark was now in a rude building, called the Temple, in the village of Shiloh.

Do you wonder why such a little boy as Samuel lived there? It was because his mother, Hannah, was so thankful to God when he was born for giving him to her, this child for whom she had longed and prayed, that she said she would lend him to the Lord; that is, let him grow up to be a priest. She believed that one who served God in this way was holier than any one else.

So, although it was very hard to part with him, she took him to live with the kind old priest Eli at the temple. He learned, as he grew older, to be very useful,—to light the candles that were kept burning all night, to prepare incense and food for the offerings, and to open the doors of the temple for the worshippers.

Once a year the people in the country roundabout came up to the temple to celebrate what was called the Feast of Tabernacles. At this time they made booths with branches of trees, and lived in them for a week to remind them of the way their forefathers lived when wandering in the wilderness. When Hannah came up to this yearly feast, she brought a new coat for Samuel, which she made herself. Oh, what love she

stitched into that little robe, as she sat at home making it and thinking of the dear boy growing up to be a good man! And what a glad and thankful time they had together in the week of rejoicing!

He grew to be the kind of boy his mother wanted him to be. Everybody loved him, he was so pleasant and so ready and free to do things for others. It was said of him that he "grew on, and was in favor with both the Lord and also with men." It was a wonder that he was so good, for he grew up with the priest's two sons, who were very bad and selfish young men. They were so greedy and wicked that they took for themselves most of the offerings which the people brought to the altar, and did things which made all the people talk about them.

When their father was told how they behaved, he would say to them: Why do you do such things? I hear no good report of you. But they paid no attention to him, and he was too old and feeble to make them behave. It seemed to the Hebrews as if God had forsaken them, that He allowed such things to be done in His temple and as if no one knew right from wrong.

These sons would not attend to their duties in the temple, so that Samuel had to minister at the altar when he was but a child.

One night, when he was asleep, he heard a voice calling, Samuel! Samuel! He thought it was the voice of Eli, and, running quickly to where Eli was lying, he said, Here am I, for thou didst call me. But Eli said, I called not: go back and lie down again. This he did, but in a few minutes he heard the voice calling again, Samuel! Samuel! Again he went to Eli, saying, I am here, for thou didst call me. The priest answered, I called not, my son, lie down again.

But a third time the voice was heard, and, as he went to Eli and said, Here am I, thou didst call me, Eli; realized that it was the Lord who was speaking to the child, and he said to him, Go back and lie down, and it shall be, if the voice call thee again, thou shalt say, Speak, Lord, for thy servant heareth. The voice was heard again, and Samuel said, Speak, Lord, for thy servant heareth. It spake, and what it said made

his heart tremble to hear. It said that, because Eli's sons had made themselves vile and he had restrained them not, the Lord would make an end of them and of Eli's house forever, and that such terrible things would happen as would make everybody's ears tingle that heard of them. After hearing this, Samuel could sleep no more, but lay in the light of the dimly burning candles, thinking about this vision.

When morning came, he arose, and went about his tasks as usual, opening the doors to let in the sunshine and the fresh air. When Eli awoke, he called him, and said: What did the Lord tell thee last night? I pray thee, hide it not from me. Samuel did not want to answer, for he loved Eli, who had been as a kind father to him, and he would not give him pain, if he could help it, for the world; but he knew that, hard as it was to do it, the truth must be spoken, and so he told every word of the vision and hid nothing from Eli. It is the Lord's will; let Him do what seemeth good, was the aged priest's reply. He felt that he must bear with an honest heart what must be borne.

He had not long to wait for the will of the Lord to be done.

Soon after this the Philistines came upon the Israelites, and there was a great battle. Let us take the ark onto the battlefield, that it may save us from the hand of our enemies, said the elders of Israel. When the sons of Eli came bringing it into the camp, the people set up such a shout that the Philistines heard it, and said, What meaneth this noise of the Hebrews? When told that the sacred ark was on the ground, they were themselves afraid, for they had heard of its magic power, and they said: Woe unto us! How can we escape? This is the God that smote the Egyptians with the plagues before the Hebrews left for the wilderness. Be strong, O ye Philistines, that ye be not servants unto the Hebrews, as they have been to you. Act like men, and fight.

And they fought so hard that the Hebrews were overcome, and fled. Eli's sons were killed, and the ark was captured. Eli sat on a seat by the city gate, waiting for news of the battle. Soon a man came running out of the camp, with his clothes torn and dust on his head as a sign of trouble. He

told the people in the city what had happened, and there went up a great cry. What meaneth the noise? asked Eli. And when he heard that his sons were killed and, what was worse to him, that the ark had been captured, he tumbled off of his seat backward, and was killed.

Thus the vision of the child in the temple came true. Shiloh was burned, the priest's family killed, and it seemed as if an end had come to all Israel's hopes. But Samuel still grew in favor with God and man; and after several years he was chosen judge to rule the people, and served them the rest of his days.

XXIV. Choosing a King.

See ye him whom the Lord hath chosen, that there is none like him among all the people.—I SAMUEL X. 24.

The trees came together once upon a time to choose a king to rule over them. First they went to the olive-tree, and said, Rule thou over us. But the olive-tree said, Should I leave growing my rich and useful fruit and go to be promoted over the trees? Then the trees said to the fig-tree, Come and rule over us, but the fig-tree said, Should I leave my sweet fruit and go to be promoted over the trees? Then said the trees to the vine, Come thou, and rule over us. And the vine said, Should I leave my wine and go to be promoted over the trees?

The trees were pretty well discouraged by this time. They all went to the rough bramble, and said, Come thou, and rule over us. And the bramble said to the trees: If you really want me to rule over you, you must come to me, and do just as I say. If not, I shall send a fire and burn you, even the beautiful cedars of Lebanon.

What do you suppose this story means? It tries to show that good men, who have a great work of their own to do in the world, do not want to be kings. But a weak-minded man, one no better than a bramble bush among trees, likes to rule over others; and, if they do not do just as he says, he will treat them as badly as the bramble bush threatened to the trees if they did not obey him.

That was the idea many people in the olden time had of kings, and it is no wonder that they thought no better of them, for they often treated the people as if they were slaves. They had to bow down or fall almost flat on the ground before them, and give them the best of everything they had.

Samuel had this idea of a king, and when he was getting old, and the Israelites came to him, saying, We want a king such as other nations have, he said to them: You don't know what you are asking for. If you have a king he will take your sons and make them drive his chariots and run before them to tell you

to bow down when he is coming. Some will have to be soldiers and captains. Others will have to reap his harvest. He will take your daughters to be his cooks and candy-makers. And he will take your servants and cattle and put them to his work. You will have to give him the best of your fields and vineyards and orchards, and the tenth part of everything you have. When you have a king, you will be sorry, and wish you had him not; but it will then be too late.

But, in spite of hearing all this, the people said: No matter. We must have a king over us, like other nations, that he may go before us and fight our battles. When Samuel saw that nothing he could say would change their minds, he told them to go home and he would find one for them. Then he began to think who would make them a good king. He remembered a tall, noble-looking young man whom he had seen, named Saul. There was not among the Israelites a goodlier person than he. From his shoulders and upward he was higher than any of the people. He would find this young man, and anoint him king.

Not long after, this same young man was sent out by his father, whose name was Kish, to see if he could find some asses that had strayed away. He took a servant with him, and they went a long distance, crossing a mountain on their way, but they saw and heard nothing of the asses. At last Saul said to the servant, Come, let us go back, for my father will wonder where we are, and be anxious about us. But the servant said, Let us keep on to this city just beyond us, for there is a holy man of God there. He can tell everything that is going to happen, and perhaps he can tell us where the asses are. But, Saul said, If we go, what can we give him for pay? For our food is eaten, and we have no present. The servant answered, See, I have a few silver pieces: these I will give him to tell us our way. Well said, exclaimed Saul, come, let us go.

So they kept on their way, and, as they climbed the hill leading to the city, they met some maidens coming out to draw water. Is the seer in the city? Saul asked them. He is, they said. He has just come, for there is to be a sacrifice to-day, and the people will not eat until he comes to bless the food. They

hurried along after hearing this, and were no sooner inside the city gate than they saw an old man walking toward the hill-top. Tell me, I pray thee, where the seer can be found, Saul said to him. What was their surprise to have him reply: I am the seer. Go before me, for you shall eat with me to-day, and I will tell thee all that is to happen to you. As for your father's asses that were lost three days ago, do not think of them, for they are found. Think of yourself rather, for, if the people of Israel do not want you to be king, I do not know whom they will choose.

Saul was more surprised than he had ever been in his life before. To be told all in a moment that he was to be a king,—he a young man out on an errand for his father,—what could it mean! He said, Do I not come from the smallest of the tribes, and my family one of the smallest in the tribe? There is surely some mistake here! But no, he was to be king. Samuel asked him to the feast at his house, and he was given the best place at the table, and the choicest food was set before him. That night, on the house-top, they talked long together about what was to be.

Early the next morning Saul heard Samuel calling him, saying, Up, that I may send you away. And, as he was leaving the city, Samuel said to him, Bid the servant pass on ahead, but stand thou still awhile, that I may show you what God wishes. Then Samuel took his horn of oil and poured it upon Saul's head, kissed him, and said, The Lord has anointed thee to be the captain of His people.

As Saul was on his way home, he met some men who told him that the asses were found and his father had ceased to worry about him. He met others carrying food for a sacrifice, and still others who had musical instruments, a psaltery, harp, tabret, and pipe, singing praises to God. When Saul heard them, his heart beat fast, his soul was stirred within him. He seemed like another man; and began to sing and praise God. But he did not tell his family what had happened when he reached home. Someway, it seemed too sacred a matter to talk about.

Even later, when Samuel called all the tribes together to see

their new king, he ran away and hid. But they found him, and when they brought him forth and he stood up before the people, they saw that he was head and shoulders higher than any of them. Then Samuel said, See him whom the Lord hath chosen; there is none like him among all the people. And they all shouted and said, God save the king!

And was Saul a king of the bramble bush kind? And was Samuel right when he said the people would be sorry if they had a king? At first Saul did what was right. He was always brave, and a good leader in time of war. But, as he grew older, he became more careless about the feelings of others and gave unwise commands.

Once he told the people not to stop to eat anything when they were trying to drive the enemy away. His son Jonathan, a brave lad, did not hear this command, and, as he rode through a wood, he put his stick into some honey that was dropping from the trees and tasted it. His father was so vexed by this that, if it had not been for the people who declared that Jonathan should not be punished, he might have put his own son to death. Saul also disobeyed God's commands as given to him by Samuel, so Samuel told him his kingdom would one day be divided, and came no more to see him.

XXV. The Boy and the Giant.

The Lord seeth not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the Lord looketh on the heart.—I SAMUEL xvi. 7.

Now the Lord came to Samuel telling him not to be sorry any longer because Saul would not obey him but to fill his horn with oil and go to Bethlehem and offer a sacrifice there, and to bid to it a man named Jesse who had several sons, for one of those sons would some day be king instead of Saul.

Samuel did as the Lord said, and asked Jesse to let his sons pass before him, that he might choose one for a king. The first one was tall and handsome, and Samuel thought surely this must be the one. But the Lord said unto him: Look not on his face nor on his height. For the Lord sees not as man sees: man looks upon the outward appearance, but the Lord looketh upon the heart. Then Jesse, the father, called the next son, and made him pass before Samuel. And he said, Neither hath the Lord chosen this one. So one after another the seven sons came before Samuel, and Samuel said unto Jesse: The Lord hath not chosen these. Are they all the children you have? Jesse replied, There is yet the youngest out in the pasture keeping his sheep. Samuel said, Send and fetch him, for we will not sit down until he cometh hither.

Soon he came in, a boy named David, with eyes bright and clear, his cheeks ruddy, his form erect and full of health. Anoint him, said the Lord to Samuel, for this is he. Samuel took his horn of oil and poured it on his head, while the family stood silently looking on. Then David went back to his sheep as if nothing had happened.

But he had not long to wait before giving proof of the kind of boy he was. The Philistines, of whom we have heard before, came again to annoy the Israelites. Among their number was a giant called Goliath. He was over ten feet in height, and wore a heavy coat of mail, with a brass breastplate, a brass helmet,

and brass leggings. His spear was so long and heavy no one but himself could hold it. Day after day this terrible man stood in front of the Philistines' camp. with his shield-bearer before him, and called out across the valley to the Israelites: Why are you waiting there? Choose a man of your number, and let him come down to me. If he be able to fight with me and to kill me, then we will be your servants; but, if I kill him, then ye shall be our servants. Give me a man, that we may fight together. When the Israelites heard this, they trembled with fear, and there was no one who dared to meet him.

One day, as he was giving his challenge, David heard him. He had been sent to the camp by his father with food for his three brothers, who were in the army, and to see how they were getting on. The soldiers said to him: Have you seen the champion that defies the army of Israel? And do you know that the king has promised to give to the man who shall kill him great riches and his daughter for a wife? David said to them: Why should anybody be afraid of such an ungodly man? How does it happen that such an one as he should defy the armies of the living God?

When Eliah, his oldest brother, heard David talking with the men, he said to him: Why did you come here? Who is taking care of your sheep in the wilderness? I know what you are here for: you have come down to see the battle and to boast of what you can do. But David said, What have I done that is wrong? and turned again to the soldiers, and asked them why they were afraid of such a man as Goliath when God was on their side. They went and told the king what he said, and the king sent for him. When he came before Saul, he said, Let no man's heart fail because of this giant: thy servant will go and fight with him. The king looked at him, and said, Thou art not able to go against this Philistine, for thou art but a youth, and he a man of war from his youth up. David replied, Thy servant kept his father's sheep, and, when there came a lion or a bear and took a lamb out of the flock, I went out after him, and smote him, and took the lamb out of his mouth, and, when he came against me, I caught him by his mane, and killed him. The Lord that

delivered me out of the paw of the lion and out of the paw of the bear will deliver me from the hand of the Philistine.

Then Saul said unto David, Go, and the Lord be with thee. And Saul gave him his own armor, his brass helmet and a coat of mail, and David put them on, but, alas! they were too heavy. I cannot wear these. I am not used to them, he said as he took them off. Then he picked up five smooth stones out of the brook, and put them in the bag that hung from his shoulder, and, taking his staff in one hand and his sling in the other, he drew near the Philistine. The people held their breath as they saw this boyish figure, without armor, advancing to meet the big giant in his heavy coat of mail, brass helmet, with a spear like a weaver's beam, and a shield-bearer before him.

When Goliath drew near and saw this youth with smooth, fair skin, and, as he thought, with nothing but a staff in his hand, he sneered: Am I a dog, that thou comest to me with staves? Come on, and I will give thy flesh unto the fowls of the air and to the beasts of the field. Do you suppose David trembled when he heard this? Not a bit. He said, in his clear, distinct voice, Thou comest to me with a sword and with a spear and with a shield, but I come to thee in the name of the Lord of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel whom thou hast defied. All these people shall know that the battle is the Lord's, and He will give you into our hands. As he said this, David ran towards him, and at just the right distance, quick as a flash, slipped one of the stones out of his bag, and sent it from his sling straight at the giant's forehead with such force that he fell over on his face to the earth.

The Philistines were dumb with wonder, and, when they saw that their great chief did not rise from the ground, they ran for their lives. Then what a shouting there was among the Israelites! Down the valley they went, chasing the enemy, breaking up their camp, and driving them far away.

After king Saul told David he could go forth to meet Goliath, he called his captain to him, and said, Abner, whose son is this youth? And Abner said, As thy soul liveth, O king, I cannot tell. And the king said, Inquire thou whose son this stripling

is. A few minutes later David was brought before him, flushed with his great victory. Saul said to him, Whose son art thou, young man? And David answered modestly, I am the son of thy servant Jesse, who lives in Bethlehem.

And did the king give him great riches and his daughter for a wife?

We shall see in the next story. But better than any reward was David's feeling that he had helped his people and served his God.

XXVI. The Two Friends.

He loved him as his own soul.—I SAMUEL xviii. 1.

Now begins a new life for David, our shepherd lad, for, after killing the giant Goliath, he came that very day to live at the palace. He found himself praised on all sides, and the king promised him his daughter for his wife; but besides this he found a friend, a true and loyal friend. This was the brave young Jonathan, who came near being put to death by his father for tasting the honey. He took off the fine robe he was wearing and put it on David, gave him his own bow, and fastened his own sword upon him with his embroidered girdle. He loved him as his own soul, and David returned the love. From that time on the two young men were fast friends, and never happier than when together.

One might think that David would make many blunders to be taken from the pastures to live in a king's house. But just as he behaved wisely at home, taking care of his father's sheep, so he behaved wisely at the palace, doing the king's bidding. Often sad and gloomy feelings came to the king, and at such times everybody around him felt uncomfortable, and disliked to stay near him. Then he would send for David to bring his harp and play to him, for David had learned to play on the harp when he was a boy, and, as the king heard the sweet strains of music, his bad feelings would leave him, and he would become cheerful again.

At other times he would send David to lead his army against the Philistines, for they came again to annoy the Israelites. Once, when they were both returning from a great battle, the women came out from the cities to meet them. They played on their musical instruments and beat their tabrets, and, as they did so, they danced in time to the music, part of them singing, Saul hath slain his thousands, and the others answering, And David his ten thousands. Saul's face grew dark with anger. What! to put David above him, above the king! The next thing they will be hailing David as the king, he thought.

He cast angry looks at David as they rode along, and from that time on his feelings towards him were changed.

The next day David brought his harp to Saul's house, to play before him, as he had often done before. But no sooner did he run his fingers over the strings than Saul seized his spear and hurled it at David with such force it went crashing into the wall behind him. David slipped out and tried to keep away from Saul after that. But, the more wisely he behaved and the more the people loved him, the angrier Saul grew and the worse he treated him, for he began to fear that God was for David and against him.

Jonathan was much troubled for his friend, and asked his father to be kind to David, telling him to think how he had risked his life in killing the giant, and to remember that he had always tried to please him. Saul listened, and promised to treat him better, but the jealous feelings came back again, whenever he saw David. One night he sent two men to watch his house and to kill him when he came out in the morning. But Michal, David's wife, told the men he was ill. Then she quickly let him down through a window by a rope, and he escaped. When the men came again, and said they must see him, she brought them up to his room, and there, covered up in the bed with its head on the goat's hair bolster, was an image instead of David.

David came to his true friend Jonathan, and said, I know that there is but a step between me and death, and I want your help. Jonathan replied, Whatever you ask me to do for you, that I will do. David said, To-morrow is the feast of the new moon, and the king expects me to sit at his table. Now let me hide myself for three days. Then, if your father misses me, tell him that I begged you to let me go to Bethlehem with my family for our yearly feast. If he says, It is well, then I know he will treat me kindly. But, if he is angry, be sure that he means to injure me.

Jonathan agreed to this. But how shall I know if your father is angry with me? said David. Come, let us go out in the field together, and I will tell you, he replied. This was the plan: that David should hide by a big rock, and Jonathan should

come to the field, bringing a little boy with him, and should shoot some arrows as if he were trying to hit a mark. If I say to the boy after I shoot, Behold! the arrows are on this side of you, then come out of your hiding-place, for you will know my father will do you no harm. But if I say to the boy, Behold! the arrows are beyond you, then you will understand my father is angry, and you must go away.

This thought was so sad the two friends fell into each other's arms, and wept together and kissed each other good-bye. David promised, if he was ever the king, to be kind to Jonathan and his children, for Jonathan loved David so much that he was willing to give up being king himself, if David might rule. So, with many promises to be faithful to each other, they parted.

Then David hid himself. The next day the king sat down to dinner on his seat by the wall. Abner, his captain, sat next to him, and Jonathan was near by. David's place was empty. Saul said nothing, for he thought David was not ready for the feast. But after the second day's meal he said to Jonathan, Why does not the son of Jesse come to eat meat, neither yesterday nor to-day? Jonathan replied, David earnestly asked leave of me to go to Bethlehem, for his family have a sacrifice in the city and his brother commanded him to go. Then Saul in his anger turned upon Jonathan. Don't you know that as long as David lives you will never be king? Send, and fetch him to me, for he shall surely die. Why should he be put to death? What harm has he done? Jonathan asked. Saul's only answer was to fling his spear at his own son. Jonathan, too-grieved and angry to eat, arose from the table and left the room.

The next morning at the time agreed upon he took his bow and arrows, and with the little lad went to the field where David was hiding behind a big rock in the distance. Run now, and find the arrows which I shoot, he said to the boy. Then, drawing his bow, he cried out, Is not the arrow beyond you? adding, Make haste, stay not.

David heard these words in his hiding-place, and knew there was no hope for him. He must hurry away as fast as he could,

for the king was determined to take his life. He left the palace never to return while Saul lived, and hid in a cave among the mountains. For a long time he was to live, as he said, like a partridge in the woods, hardly daring to venture out. He gathered about him many followers, and we shall hear about their adventures in the next story.

XXVII. The Outlaw.

Thou art more righteous than I; for thou hast rewarded me good, whereas I have rewarded thee evil.—I SAMUEL XXIV.

17.

We found that David had to leave the king's palace and hide in the mountains to save his life. He went to the cave of Adullam. As soon as it was known where he was, many people came to join him. There were those who were poor, those in debt, and those who disliked Saul, four hundred of these men, and David became their captain. He had secured the sword that was Goliath's, he had sent his father and mother out of the country to be safe, and was ready to defend himself from Saul. He found that he could help the Israelites, who were living near, fight the Philistines who were ever stealing wheat from the Israelites' threshing-floors.

Saul took his spear in his hand, gathered his soldiers together under a great tree, and said to them: Can the son of Jesse give you fields and vineyards and make you captains of hundreds and captains of thousands, as I do? Yet see how many of my people have turned against me. None of you are sorry for me or bring me word that my own son Jonathan aided David to escape. Talking in this way, he won their promise to help him, and then began exciting times; for Saul and his followers set out to find David. When they heard where he was, they tried to surround him and his men. Once, when he was in a city, they thought he was surely theirs. But David heard that Saul was near and escaped. Again, he was on one side of the mountain and Saul was on the other. That time it seemed as if they would surely capture him; but just then word was brought to Saul that a worse enemy, the Philistines, were coming, and he had to leave chasing David to go and drive them away.

When he came back, he heard that David and his followers were in a rocky place where wild goats lived, beyond some sheep-cotes. Saul set out to find him, but by the time he drew near he was quite tired out. He went just inside a deep cave

among the rocks, covered himself with his blanket, threw himself on the ground, and was soon sound asleep. Who do you think was in that same deep cave? None other than David and some of his men. The men were glad when they discovered Saul asleep there, for now he could be easily killed, and all this trouble would be ended. But David said to them, The Lord forbid that I should stretch forth my hand against him, for he has been anointed king by the Lord. Yet he did quietly slip up to him, and cut off the end of his long robe. In this he felt that perhaps he had wronged the king, and his conscience troubled him.

When Saul awoke and came out of the cave, he heard a voice calling, My lord the king. He looked behind him, and what was his surprise to see David bowing low to the ground, holding a piece of the royal robe in his hand. Why do you listen when people tell you I am your enemy? said David. Your eyes have seen how the Lord has given you this day into my hand in the cave. Some of my men bade me kill you, but I said, I will not put forth my hand against my lord; for he is the Lord's anointed. See, here is this piece of your robe which I cut off; yet I have not killed you, but you hunt my soul to take it. The Lord judge between me and thee. After whom is the king of Israel come out? One who is no more than a dead dog or a flea. The Lord plead my cause and rescue me out of thine hand.

Then how sorry Saul was when he heard what David said for he felt that it was true. He remembered how he once loved him. He cried like a little child, and said: Is that really thy voice, my son David? Thou art more righteous than I; for thou hast rewarded me good, whereas I have rewarded thee evil. For, if a man find his enemy, does he let him go away? The Lord will reward thee well for what thou hast done to me this day. Now I know well that thou wilt surely be king. And Saul sadly turned away and went home, and David went back to the cave.

One might think that after this Saul would remain quietly at home and let David alone; but he set out again to find him, and once more David spared his life. When Saul was sound

asleep in his tent one night, David quietly entered it, and carried away the spear and flask of water that stood near his pillow. In the morning Abner, Saul's captain, heard some one calling him. He looked up, and there on the mountain side was David, holding out the spear and flask of water, crying, Why don't you answer, Abner? Are you not a valiant man? Why have you not kept better watch over your lord the king? See where the king's spear is, and the flask of water that was beside his pillow. Saul heard him, and came out of his tent and said, Return, my son David, for I will no more do thee harm. I have played the fool. But David, after telling him that he had never wronged him, said, Let one of your young men come and get your spear, and then he hurried away.

David said in his heart: I shall surely perish by the hand of Saul. There is nothing better for me to do than to leave my own country and go to the land of the Philistines, for Saul will never seek as far as the seacoast for me. So with his faithful followers he went to Achish, the Philistine king, and asked if he might live in some quiet spot in his country and serve him. The king consented, and gave him a place called Ziklag, and there he and his men settled down with their families.

While he was living there, a man came hurrying to him one day with the news that there had been a great battle with the Hebrews, and that his old enemy, Saul, and his true friend, Jonathan, were both dead. The messenger gave him the gold crown which he had taken from Saul's head and a bracelet taken from his arm, feeling sure that David would be pleased and reward him for these things. But David was more grieved than pleased.

This news meant that David was to go back to his own country to be king; but his first thoughts were of the men that were slain. He forgot how jealous of him Saul had been, and remembered only his greatness. And he wept for his true friend, Jonathan, and said:

"Saul and Jonathan were lovely and pleasant in their lives,
And in their death they were not divided;
They were swifter than eagles,
They were stronger than lions.

Ye daughters of Israel, weep over Saul
Who clothed you in scarlet delicately,
Who put ornaments of gold upon your apparel.
I am distressed for thee, my brother Jonathan;
Very pleasant hast thou been to me.
Thy love to me was wonderful, passing the love of women.
How are the mighty fallen,
And the weapons of war perished!"

XXVIII. The King and his Rebel Son.

Deal gently for my sake with the young man.—2 SAMUEL xviii. 5.

David could not stay mourning in the Philistine country for Saul and Jonathan. He must be up and doing, for there were many enemies to overcome and much to be done to make his kingdom strong. First a city on a hill, which had never been captured since the days of Joshua, must be taken for his new capital. The Canaanites who lived there had laughed at those who tried to do this, for there were such steep cliffs on all sides that they declared that even its blind and lame could defend it. But David's brave men scaled the rocks, took it, and made of it a big city, which was called Jerusalem or the City of David.

There a splendid palace was built for him and his family, rich merchants in other countries sending fine things for it. David wanted to build a temple in which to put the ark, but God said he was too much of a soldier, and only a peaceful ruler should do that. Yet the ark could be taken from another place and brought to Jerusalem, and there was a great celebration over its coming. It was put on a new cart drawn by oxen, and the people formed a long procession and followed it with bands of music and with songs and shouts of joy. David was so happy to think the sacred ark of God was to be near him and that he was at last king of all the land that he danced before it with all his might. When it was put in its place within the city, he offered sacrifices to the Lord, and everybody, women as well as men, had a great feast, with so much to eat that each had something to take home.

In the midst of his new duties, David did not forget the promise he made to Jonathan that he would always be kind to his children. As soon as he was king, he sent for one of his servants, and said, Is there any of Saul's family living, that I may show them kindness for Jonathan's sake? And the servant said, Jonathan had a lame son who is living.

David said, Where is he? Bring him to me. Soon after this Mephibosheth—for that was the lame man's name—came before David, and bowed his face to the ground and said, Behold thy servant.

David said to him very gently, Fear not, for I will surely show thee kindness for Jonathan thy father's sake, and will give thee back all the land that belonged to thy father; and you shall eat at my table. Mephibosheth was very thankful to David for this kindness, for he knew that some kings would have regarded him as no better than a dead dog. But David could not forget the deep love he had for Jonathan nor the promise that he gave him when his life was in danger years before.

Years went by. Riches and honor came to David; but he had many battles to fight and many sorrows to endure, some of them because of his own wrong-doing. A dear baby died, which was a grief to him; but more sad even than this was the way one of his sons turned against him.

This son's name was Absalom. Every one praised him for his good looks. They said he was handsome from the sole of his foot to the crown of his head. His long and heavy hair was especially admired. But this fine-looking fellow was vain and selfish, and determined to have his own way. He had plenty of money to spend, and he rode out each day in his splendid gold chariot, with fifty men running before him to tell the people to bow down to him just as if he were the king himself.

Then he would sit beside the gate of the city, and, when people came there to have their disputes settled,—for in those days they came to the city gate instead of a court-room for such matters,—he would tell them, if he were only the judge, every man's trouble should be decided in a way that would please him. He would pretend to be very fond of them, and put his arm around them and kiss them as if they were his dear friends. He did this so that they would wish he was the king instead of his father David.

One day he went to Hebron, saying he wished to thank God for a favor. No sooner was he there, than he sent messengers

throughout the land to tell the people that, when they heard the trumpets blow, they must come to him and be ready to go away. David heard of this, and decided to go away. So, with his family and servants and the old soldiers who had fought for him years before when Saul pursued him, he left the palace to go into the wilderness. They all went out barefooted, and had their robes and shawls thrown over their heads to show their great sorrow, and they wept bitterly.

But David did not lose his kingdom. One of his wisest men stayed behind, and, when Absalom asked this man what to do first to make sure of getting the kingdom, thinking him to be his friend, he gave Absalom advice that was bad for him, but good for his father David. He told him to wait before he took the throne until he had a larger army. This gave David time to gather more followers, and it was not long before he had a large army, which he divided into three companies. He wanted to lead them himself to battle, but they all said: No, indeed. If we die, it does not matter much, but you are worth ten thousand of us. David stood where he could see the companies as they went out to seek the enemy, and he said to each of the three captains as they passed him, Deal gently for my sake with the young man. He loved Absalom so much that, although Absalom was fighting against him, he did not want him injured.

Then there was a battle in a forest, and Absalom's soldiers were beaten and scattered throughout the wood. And, as Absalom was riding past on his mule, his long hair caught in the thick branches of a great oak-tree and he was held fast. The mule kept on running, and there he was, poor fellow, hanging by his hair until he was slain.

David was waiting by the city gate for news of the battle. He sent a watchman to the top of it to tell him what he saw. I see a man coming, said the watchman, and the king thought, If he is alone, he has tidings. The watchman cried, I see another man coming. And the king said, He also has tidings. The watchman cried, Methinks the first one is Ahimaaz, the son of Zadok. And the king said, He is a good man, and it must be that he cometh with good tidings. All is well,

called out Ahimaaz, saying, as he bowed before him, Blessed be the Lord thy God who has punished the men that lifted up their hand against my lord the king. And the king said, Is the young man Absalom safe? The messenger answered, There was a great tumult, but I do not know what it was about; for he did not want to tell the bad news to the king. Turn aside, and stand here, said the king.

Then the second messenger came running up. Is the young man safe, Cushie? said the king. And Cushie answered, May all your enemies and all who try to injure you be as that young man is. Then David knew that his son had been killed. He went up to the little room over the gate, crying, O my son Absalom, my son, my son Absalom! Would God I had died instead of thee, O Absalom, my son, my son! Not until one of his captains told him that the people were complaining because he was grieving so much for one who had shown himself his enemy and theirs did he leave off weeping and come down from his chamber over the gate.

XXIX. A Wise King.

Give thy servant an understanding heart.—1 KINGS iii. 9.

If some good fairy should come to you and tell you to wish for the thing you want most what would your wish be? Suppose you had just been crowned king, and were to rule over a great country, what then would you most wish for? There was a young man whose name was Solomon, and when his father David, the David of whom we have heard so much, was getting old, he had Solomon crowned king, to be sure that he should rule after he himself was gone.

One night Solomon dreamed that God said to him, Ask what I shall give thee. Some young men might have asked for money, for fame, or for power, but Solomon said: O Lord my God, Thou hast made Thy servant king instead of David, my father, and I am like a little child. I know not how to go out or come in, and I am in the midst of a great people that cannot be numbered. Give therefore Thy servant an understanding heart to judge Thy people, that I may know good from evil.

This speech pleased the Lord, and He said, You shall have a wise and understanding heart. You shall be more wise than any that have ruled before you or any that shall come after you. You shall be rich and people will praise you; and, if you will keep my commandments, you will have a long life. When Solomon awoke, he remembered his dream. He hoped it would come true. We shall see if he had wisdom, riches and honor, and a long life.

He studied things about him,—the cedar-trees that grew on Mount Lebanon and the vines on the wall. He found out the ways of animals and birds and fishes, how they lived and how they grew. He observed the people about him, listened to their talk about life and how to live. This study helped him to settle their disputes.

Once two women came before him, each carrying a little baby in her arms but one child was not alive. Each of them said the

living baby was hers. One woman said, O my lord, I and this woman live in the same house, and her child died in the night, and she came to me while I was asleep and put it into my arms in place of my own son. When I waked in the morning and was going to feed my child, I saw that it was not alive. I looked at it again, and I saw that it was not my son, but hers, and that mine was gone. The other woman said, No, the living child is mine and the other is hers. No, it is not so, said the first woman. It is, said the second. The living is my son, the other is yours.

Solomon said, Bring me a sword. Take it, he said, to a servant, and divide the living child in two, and give half to one and half to the other. Then the true mother cried, O my Lord, give the other the living child and in no wise slay it. But the other said, Let it be neither hers nor mine, but divide it. Then the king said, Give it to the one that would spare it, for she is the mother thereof. When the people heard of this, they said, The wisdom of God is in the king.

Nothing had ever been known before like the splendor of Solomon's reign. One of the first things he did was to build a temple, or house of God, in which to put the ark. He sent to Hiram, a king in the north country, asking for timber from his great forests of Lebanon. This king was friendly to him, and set his men to work cutting down hundreds of great cedar and fir trees. These were fastened together in rafts and floated down the sea. Then they were hauled up the steep hills to Jerusalem. It took thousands of men to do this and to cut stones from the quarries, shape them, and put them in place.

The temple was built of white stone, with pillars on three sides and a porch in front. There was a small room in the center for the ark, the floors and walls of which were overlaid with gold and carved with figures of cherubim and palm-trees and flowers. There were two gold cherubim with outstretched wings over the place where the ark was to stand, and gold chains before the door. It took seven years to build this temple, and, when it was done, there was not a more beautiful building in all the world.

The ark was brought from the tabernacle David made for it by priests, followed by a long procession of people. Sacrifices were offered, with clouds of incense filling the temple. Solomon stood before the altar, and spread forth his hands towards heaven and prayed for God's blessing upon the people. Then followed a great feast, after which all went to their tents, joyful and glad of heart for all the goodness of God to Israel.

After the temple was finished, Solomon built a beautiful palace for himself and family, which had so many pillars about it that it was called the house of the forest of Lebanon. In it was an ivory and gold throne, with a carved lion on either side of it, and six carved lions on each side of the six steps that led up to it.

Solomon sent his ships over the sea, and they came back loaded with gold and silver dishes, monkeys, peacocks, horses and mules, harps and musical instruments, gorgeous garments and heavy armor. There were over a thousand chariots and twelve thousand horsemen in his cities. Thus Solomon had wisdom and great riches. Did he have fame also? Yes. People were never tired of talking of this wonderful king.

One day he saw a long train of camels coming in the distance. In front rode a woman, the queen of Sheba, from a far-away country called Arabia. Her camels were laden with precious stones and gold and spices as a present for Solomon; and she was coming to ask him questions about things that had long been puzzling her. Solomon answered them, every one. And when the queen saw his fine palace, noticed the number of his servants, tasted the food that was served in his gold and silver dishes, she exclaimed, I would not believe all that I heard about you until I saw it with my own eyes; but truly the half was not told me. Happy are these people who serve thee and can hear thy wisdom.

So Solomon had wisdom and riches and fame, and he lived to be an old man. But the older he grew, the more he forgot what he had wished for in his dream when he was first crowned king. He made the people who built his temples and palaces work too hard, and gave them little pay for what they did. He did not care whether they had a chance to get wealth or

wisdom or lead happy lives. He grew more and more selfish. He forgot the God who blessed him, and bowed down to idols. So we cannot say that he was as good as he was great. He left his kingdom in such a state that it broke up after he died, and the glory soon departed from it.

XXX. A Bold Prophet.

*How long halt ye between two opinions?—*1 KINGS xviii. 21.

There lived a man some time after the reign of Solomon who did not care for money or fame or honor or a fine palace. He only wanted to obey God and do the right, and he spent his life trying to make others do the same. He was a prophet, and lived in a cave in the wilderness. His hair and beard were long, and his skin rough and hairy. He dressed in skins of animals, with a leather belt around his waist. Whenever he looked at any one, it seemed as if he saw every fault, and those who had done wrong trembled at his coming, for they felt that he was sent by God.

One day this prophet appeared before Ahab, the king, and, raising his hands to heaven, he said, As the Lord liveth, there shall not fall upon the ground any dew or rain until I call for it. At first the king did not believe this saying would come true; but when he found that no rain came day after day, and saw the bright flowers fade, the grass turn brown, the leaves fall from the trees, the dust cover the houses, and that the wheat and corn would not grow, he became alarmed, and wished he could find Elijah and get him to change his words.

But Elijah had hidden in a cool, shady ravine among the hills, where a little brook flowed. He did not need to venture out of it, for flocks of ravens lived in the trees, and they brought him food in their beaks. He stayed there until the brook dried up, and then went further away.

One day as he came near to the gate of a city, he saw a woman gathering sticks to build a fire. He called to her, and said, Fetch me a little water in a cup, that I may drink. As she was going to get it, he added, Bring me also, I pray thee, a morsel of bread in your hand. But she replied, As the Lord liveth, I have not a cake, but only a handful of meal in a barrel and a little oil in a bottle; and, behold! I am gathering two sticks, that I may go home and cook the meal for my son and myself, that we may eat it and die. Then Elijah said to her,

Fear not, go and do as you have said; but make me a little cake first, and after that bake some for you and your son, for the Lord has said there will always be plenty of meal and oil for you. The woman went and did as Elijah said, and she and her son had enough to last for many days.

Ahab and his wife Jezebel, who was a very unkind woman, and the courtiers and the people suffered much because there was no water. The animals, too, began to die. One day Ahab and the governor of his house, Obadiah, set out to search the country over to see if they could find any springs or brooks. Whom should they see in a lonely place but a strange-looking man in a dress of skins and leather belt, none other than Elijah, who came quickly to meet them!

As soon as the king saw him, he exclaimed, Is it thou, thou troubler of Israel? Was Elijah afraid of the king? And did he make excuses for the drouth? Not at all. He looked him straight in the face, and said, I have not troubled Israel, but you have; for you have forgotten the commandments of the Lord and worshiped idols. Send now for all your people and prophets and priests, and tell them to go to Mount Carmel. Ahab did this, for he hoped to win back Elijah's favor.

They all came up the mountain, and Elijah stood up before them, and said, How long will it be before you decide what to do? If you believe the Lord is your God, then follow Him; but, if Baal be your god, then follow him. The people answered him not a word. Elijah waited a minute, and then said, I, even I only, am a prophet of the Lord; but there are four hundred and fifty of you. Now let us build two altars, and offer on each a sacrifice to our god. You may call on the name of your god to kindle a fire on your altar, and I will call upon the name of the Lord to do the same on mine, and the god that answers by fire shall be the true god. All the people answered this time, saying, It is well spoken. You may call upon your god first, said Elijah.

So the prophets piled up stones and wood, and put on it an offering, and called out: Baal! Baal! But there was no voice in reply. Baal! Baal! they called again, but there

was no answer. O Baal, hear us! they called steadily from morning until noon, and they leaped upon the altar, waving their arms, but no answer came.

Elijah stood quietly by, watching them, and, when the noon-time came, he said to them, Cry louder, for perhaps your god is talking, or maybe he is seeking some one, or else he is gone on a journey, or possibly he is asleep and must be awakened. And they cried louder still, all the afternoon until it was the time of their evening sacrifice, but there was no voice nor answer, nor any attention paid to them. They threw themselves down, weary and disheartened.

Then Elijah said unto them, Come near me; and they all drew near and watched him while he piled up some heavy stones for his altar, made a trench about it, then laid on the wood, and placed on top the offering. After this he asked some of them to fill four barrels of water and pour it on the altar. They did so. He said, Do it four times. The water ran all over the altar and filled the ditch around it. Then he cried out, saying: Lord God of Abraham, Isaac, and of Israel, let it be known this day that Thou art God, and that I am Thy servant, and that I have done these things at Thy word. Hear me, O Lord, hear me, that this people may know that Thou art the Lord God, and that Thou hast turned their heart back again. Then the fire of the Lord fell, and burned the offering and the wood and the stones and the dust and licked up the water in the ditch. When the people saw it, they fell on their faces saying, The Lord, He is God the Lord, He is God.

Then Elijah said to Ahab, Now you may eat and drink, for there is a sound of rain. Then he sat down, put his face between his knees, and listened,—listened intently for the sound of wind stirring. He said to his servant, Go up higher, and look toward the sea. The man climbed up to the highest peak. When he came back, he said, I see nothing. Go seven times, was the reply. When the man came back the seventh time, he said, I see a little cloud no bigger than a man's hand. Tell Ahab to get ready his chariot, and go down the mountain quickly before the rain comes, said the prophet.

And suddenly the sky was filled with heavy black clouds, the wind blew, and the rain fell in torrents. Ahab climbed into his chariot, and was driven home as fast as he could go. When there, he told his wife at once how Elijah's Lord had come to his altar, and that the prophets of Baal had been destroyed. Jezebel was very angry, and sent a messenger to Elijah, threatening to do to him as he had done to her prophets. So again he went away to the wilderness, and we shall hear more of him in the next story.

XXXI. A Prophet's Disciple.

As the Lord liveth and as thy soul liveth, I will not leave thee.—2 KINGS ii. 2.

After the heavy rain-storm of that day on Mount Carmel, when Elijah had triumphed over the prophets of Baal, the little brooks began to flow again, the fields became green, and the ground moist. It was the time for farmers to sow their seed, and one pleasant day a young man might have been seen guiding his oxen in a large field by the river Jordan. In front of him were eleven other plows in line, drawn by as many yoke of oxen, and all directed by him; for there was much work for the young man, whose name was Elisha, to do for his father.

Yet a greater work was soon to be asked of him. A strange figure, in a dress of skins and leather girdle, crossed over the river, took off the mantle he was wearing, and, coming up to Elisha, threw it over his shoulders.

Elisha knew at once who it was that came to him in this manner and why this was done. It was a signal for him to leave his home and go with the man to be his helper. Let me, I pray thee kiss my father and my mother, and then I will follow thee, he said, as the man began to go on his way.

Can we guess who the stranger was? It was Elijah, who had come back from the wilderness, to which he went when he heard that Jezebel wished to have him killed. When there, he was weary and heart-sick for it seemed as if there was no one but himself who cared whether God was worshiped or not.

But one day he climbed a mountain called Horeb, hoping God would have some message for him. As he awaited, a great wind came sweeping over the mountain with such force that the rocks even were broken in pieces; but he heard not the voice of the Lord in the wind. Then there was an earthquake, and the whole mountain shook; but the Lord's voice was not in the earthquake. After that there was a fire which

lit up the whole sky; but the Lord was not in the fire. After the fire there came a still, small voice. As he heard this, Elijah covered his face with his mantle, came down the mountain, and stood in the entrance of the cave.

The still, small voice whispered, What doest thou here, Elijah? The people have forgotten Thy commandments, thrown down Thine altars, and slain Thy prophets; and I, even I only, am left, and they seek my life to take it away, Elijah answered. Then the still, small voice told him that there were many faithful worshipers still left in Israel, that he must go back and anoint another man as king, and choose Elisha to be his helper and successor.

This he did, and Elisha proved to be a faithful disciple. Many were the sick and troubled ones who were helped by these two in the years that followed.

But the time came when Elijah must leave his work and the world, for he was now an old man. He knew how sorry his young friend would be to part with him, and he thought it would be better to go when they were not together. They were at a place called Gilgal, and the old man said to the younger, Stay here, I pray thee, for the Lord has sent me to Bethel. Elisha had been told that his master must be taken away, and he could not bear the thought of parting with him. As the Lord liveth and as thy soul liveth, I will not leave thee, he said. So they went down to Bethel together. No sooner were they there than Elijah said again, Stay here, I pray thee, for the Lord hath sent me to Jericho. Again Elisha clung to him with the same words: As the Lord liveth and as thy soul liveth, I will not leave thee. So together they journeyed on to Jericho.

Once more the old prophet tried to spare him the last parting, and told Elisha that the Lord had sent his master over the Jordan, and once more the faithful disciple exclaimed, I will not leave thee.

They came to the banks of the river, and, while their friends watched them at a distance, Elijah smote the waters with his mantle and they parted, so that the two crossed over on dry ground.

Then the last words were spoken. The old prophet asked

the younger if there was anything he could do for him before he went, and Elisha begged for a double share of his spirit. As they stood talking together, behold! there appeared a chariot and horses of fire which parted them, and Elijah was caught up in the chariot, and went up by a whirlwind into heaven.

My father, my father, the chariot of Israel and the horsemen thereof! cried Elisha, in sorrow; but the old prophet was gone. Fifty strong men searched the mountains and valleys over, thinking he might have been carried to some secluded spot, but he was never seen again.

Now was the young prophet lonely indeed; but there were people all about him who were poor and ill and in trouble, and, with Elijah's example to follow, he could not long remain idle or sad.

The king, too, must be told how to deal with his enemies at the north, who were trying to conquer the land. For a long time these enemies could not understand why their movements were always discovered by the Israelites, but at last some one told their king that the prophet Elisha could see into their plans, and that it was he who made them known.

When the king heard this, he sent his war horses and chariots and a great army in the night to surround the city of Dothan where Elisha was stopping. The next morning Elisha's young servant arose early, and great was his surprise to see what had happened in the night. Alas, my master, what shall we do? he said, as he came running back in alarm. Fear not, calmly answered Elisha, for those who are with us are more than those who are with them. Then he prayed, Lord, open the eyes of the young man, that he may see. And the eyes of the young man were opened, and he saw, and, behold! the mountains round about them were full of horses and chariots of fire. But Elisha needed not their help. As the enemy drew near, he greeted them kindly, saying, Follow me, and I will bring you to the man you seek. They had no idea that it was Elisha who was speaking to them, and he easily led them to the Hebrew king of Samaria. Then they saw, all too late, how blind they had been to be taken into the very midst of their enemies.

When the king saw them, he said to Elisha, My father, shall I smite them? Elisha answered, Thou shalt not smite them. Wouldest thou smite those whom thou hast taken captive with thy sword and with thy bow? Set bread and water before them, that they may eat and drink, and go to their master.

When Elisha was in his last sickness, Joash, the king of Israel, came down unto him, and wept over him, and said, My father, my father, the chariots of Israel and the horsemen thereof! And Elisha said unto him: Take bow and arrows. Now put thine hand upon the bow. Then Elisha laid his hand upon the king's hand. Open the window eastward. Now shoot. And the king shot. The prophet said, The Lord's arrow of victory, even the arrow of victory over Syria! for thou shalt smite the Syrians in Aphek, till thou hast consumed them.

Again he said to the king, Take the arrows: smite upon the ground. The king smote three times, and stopped. And the man of God was wroth with him, and said, Thou shouldest have smitten five or six times, then hadst thou smitten Syria till thou hadst consumed it: whereas now thou shalt smite Syria but thrice.

This was the last act of the old prophet. The spirit that he had shown all his life was with him in his last breath.

XXXII. A Little Maid.

If the prophet had bid thee do some great thing, wouldest thou not have done it? How much rather then, when he said to thee, Wash and be clean?—2 KINGS v. 13.

In the time of Elisha there lived a little maid who was born in the city of Samaria, the prophet's home, though she did not grow up there. This was because she was carried away to a country north of Samaria, called Syria, by some soldiers, and sold as a slave to a captain in their army, whose name was Naaman. There were many wars between the Israelites and the Syrians, and, when the latter won a battle, the soldiers took home with them not only all the treasures they could find, but people as well.

The little maid was not unhappy in her new home, for she was treated kindly by her master and mistress, whom she faithfully served and whom she learned to love.

Naaman was a brave soldier and always did his duty. He was much thought of by the king, and had many favors shown him. But he lacked one thing needful to make him happy, and that was health. He was ill with a disease which no one could cure, called leprosy.

The little slave girl felt very sorry to see her kind master suffer, and one day she said to her mistress, Would that my lord were with the prophet that lives in Samaria, for he would surely cure him! She had heard of the wonderful things Elisha had done before she was taken away from home. Stories were told of his making a bitter spring sweet; of his helping a poor widow by causing oil to fill all the dishes she had and all she could borrow from her neighbors, that she might sell it and pay her debts; of his putting meal into poisonous food, so that the people could eat it without harm; of his feeding a hundred men with a few loaves of bread and a few ears of corn, and having much left over after they had eaten all they could; and of his even bringing a dead boy to life. She felt sure that the great and good prophet who could do such things could cure her master.

Some of Naaman's household told the king what the little maid had said, and, when he heard it, he declared, I will send a letter to the king of Israel, asking him to have Naaman cured. So he wrote, I have sent Naaman, my servant, to you with this letter, that you may cure him of his leprosy. This note he gave to Naaman, together with ten talents of silver, six thousand pieces of gold, and ten beautiful garments.

The sick man set out in his chariot for Samaria, full of hope and courage, and after a few days' journey he arrived at the king's palace, and sent the letter in to him. When the king read it, he was in a great rage. Am I a God, he shouted, to kill and make alive, that I am asked to cure a man who cannot be cured? The king of Syria is seeking a quarrel with me. Every one in the palace became anxious and alarmed; for they feared the powerful king of Syria, and no one knew what to make of the letter or what to do.

Elisha soon heard of their trouble, and he sent a message to the king, saying, Why are you so disturbed? Let Naaman come to me, and he shall know that there is a prophet in Israel. The king was glad when he heard this, and hastily sent word to his visitor, telling him where he could go to be cured.

So the horses were turned about, and down the streets of Samaria came the chariot bearing the sick man, and stopped at the door of Elisha's humble home. When Elisha heard of its arrival, he sent his servant out to Naaman with this message: Go and wash in the Jordan seven times and your flesh shall come again to you and you shall be clean. Naaman was very angry when he was told this. He expected that when Elisha knew that he was at his door, the prophet would come out and greet him, and then stand and call on the Lord his God, and wave his hand over him, and that then instantly he would be cured. Instead of this he was told to go and wash in the Jordan river. Are not the rivers near my home in Syria better than all the waters of Israel put together? he exclaimed in a great rage. I may as well have remained at home if that is all there is to do to be cured. And he told his driver to turn around and go home. But his servant who had followed him drew near, and said, If the prophet had bid you

do some great thing, would you not have done it? How much better, then, to trust him when he says, Wash and be clean.

To his credit, be it said, Naaman listened to this advice. He put his pride from him, controlled his angry feelings, and was driven to the river Jordan. He dipped himself into its waters seven times, as Elisha told him to do. And, strange to say, after the last time his skin became as pink and smooth as that of a little child, and he was well again.

How different was the ride back to Samaria! He felt like a new man, full of joy and thankfulness as he came again to the prophet's door. He could hardly praise him enough. Behold, he said, I know now that there is no God in all the earth but yours in Israel. Now, therefore, take a present from me, your servant. Then he offered Elisha the silver and gold and beautiful garments that he had brought with him.

But Elisha said, As the Lord liveth before whom I stand, I will receive no present. In vain did Naaman urge him. He would take nothing, for he felt that it was in truth God who cured Naaman. And a man such as he himself was needed not gifts of any kind to make him happy.

Then, said Naaman, may I not take as much of your earth as two mules can carry, that I may make an altar in my own country, and there worship your God, for hereafter I will never bow down to any god but yours? Only, when I am by the side of my master, the king, and he leans on my hand to bow down to his god, then I must do as he does. The Lord pardon thy servant in this thing.

Go in peace, said Elisha.

We may believe the little maid was glad to see her kind master well in his own home.

XXXIII. Two Boy Kings.

Cease to do evil; learn to do well.—ISAIAH i. 16, 17.

If we could have looked into the temple that Solomon built on a certain day years after he ruled, we might have seen a little boy, only seven years old, standing by one of its many graceful pillars. He had over his shoulders a long, richly embroidered robe, and upon his head was a heavy gold crown. On either side of him was a long line of soldiers, armed with spears, bucklers, and swords, reaching to the palace, and even beyond that to the city gate. A great chorus were chanting hymns of praise, while others were playing upon harps, tabrets, and all kinds of musical instruments, while trumpeters blew their trumpets. The court of the temple was filled with people, all clapping their hands and shouting, "God save the king."

Yes, this little boy, only seven years old, whose name was Joash, had just been anointed king by the high priest Jehoiada, and had promised to rule the people well. It was a great day for him, for up to this time he had been hidden from the people, that no harm might come to him, ever since he was a little baby only a year old.

At that time there was a wicked woman, named Athaliah, who wished to be queen. She tried to have all the princes whose right it was to rule put to death, and succeeded in doing so with the exception of this little Joash. He escaped because Jehosheba, his aunt, heard what was being done, and hurried to the palace in season to carry him and his nurse away. She took him to the temple, and there he had been living quietly for six years. Although so young, he was taught by the good priest Jehoiada in many things that would be helpful to him as a king.

In the mean time Athaliah ruled as queen, for she had no idea that this prince was alive, and she expected of course to stay on the throne all her days. She heard the shouting and the clapping of hands, and hurried to the temple, and there, to her surprise, stood the little boy with the gold crown on his

head. Treason, treason! she shouted, meaning that her kingdom was to be taken from her. She tried to make the people do her bidding and follow her as queen; but no one obeyed her, no one cared for her, for they knew how many wrong things she had done. Take her away outside the city gate, said the priest. Let no one kill her here. So she was driven out of the city.

The people marched from the temple to the palace and placed the young king on the throne, and great was the rejoicing in all the city. As long as the good priest Jehoiada lived to direct him, Joash ruled the people well, and there was peace in the land.

The temple had been neglected by the false queen, who cared little for what was beautiful or good, and was in great need of repairs. Joash had a chest made with a hole in its lid, and placed it beside the altar. He asked the people, when they came to worship, to bring money and drop it into the box for the repairing of the temple. It was not long before the chest was full. Then the money was taken out, put into bags, and all the carpenters, masons, brass and iron makers who worked on the temple, were paid. So much was brought that there was not only enough for them, but enough also to buy gold and silver vessels for the altar.

When the people saw how beautiful their house of worship had been made, they were full of joy, and praised their young king for the great and good thing he had done. He was a good king so long as he loved God with all his heart; but, after Jehoiada died, he fell into bad company, neglected the temple, forgot God, cared not for the feelings of the people, and no one was sorry when he died.

Several years after Joash's reign there was another boy king, who made the people still happier by what he did for them. He began to rule when he was only eight years old, and he was called the good king Josiah.

There were bad kings before him, who had brought into the house of the Lord images of different gods and allowed the people to worship them as if they were the real God. There were altars for the worship of the sun and moon and stars,

figures of white horses and golden chariots for the use of these gods, cups, tinkling bells, vessels in which things were burnt that gave a sweet smell, and all kinds of things in wood and stone used in this kind of worship.

Many of the faithful Hebrews felt very sorry about this, but, so long as the kings permitted it, they could do nothing.

The temple was again out of repair, and, like the other boy king, young Josiah decided to repair it. One day he sent his servant over to the temple to get the offerings of the people with which to pay the workmen. When the servant returned to the palace, he brought with him a book which Hilkiah, the high priest, said he found in the house of the Lord. This book was called the Book of the Law. It was read to the king, and, when he learned what was in it, he was greatly alarmed. It told how the Lord should be worshiped, and had many laws against all other kinds of worship. And it said that, if these laws were not kept, all the people would be severely punished from the king down.

Josiah did not know what to do. He asked the advice of a prophetess, named Huldah, and she told him that great troubles would come because these laws had not been kept.

He at once called the wise men, the elders and priests, and the people, great and small, young and old, together, and read to them this Book of the Law. And then and there they all agreed to keep the laws in the book with all their hearts and might.

Then followed stirring times; for this meant that all the images, altars, and other things used in the worship of other gods than the God of Israel were to be destroyed. Their worshipers were to be punished, their priests driven from the land.

This was a great task for a young king. But he set himself to it with all his soul and strength. All the things in the temple forbidden by the laws were taken out and burned, and everywhere the images and altars of the gods were cast down. So well did this boy king do his work that it was said that never before was there such a change in the religion of a nation. And because he did so much to make the religion of his people pure he was called the "Good King Josiah."

XXXIV. Building a Wall.

I am doing a great work, so that I cannot come down: why should the work cease, whilst I leave it?—NEHEMIAH vi. 3.

The king of Persia was having a feast one day in his gorgeous palace. All kinds of dainty food were passed to the guests by quiet-footed slaves. From time to time his faithful cup-bearer handed the king his golden cup from which he drank. The king noticed that his servant had a downcast look, and said to him, Why are you so sad to-day, Nehemiah, for you are not ill? It must be sorrow of heart. The cup-bearer was afraid at first to tell the king the reason of his sadness, but he spoke up bravely, and said, Let the king live forever! Why should not my face be sad when the city where my fathers lived and died has gone to waste, and the walls are broken down, and the gates burned?

For Nehemiah had just learned that this was the case from friends who had come from Jerusalem. Ever since the news came, he had been weeping and praying and asking God to let the people who had been taken captives return to their own country and be free and happy again.

He was much surprised when the king, instead of being angry, as he feared, said kindly, What do you wish? Nehemiah breathed a silent prayer to God, and then said, If it please the king, and if I have favor in your eyes, let me go back to Jerusalem and rebuild it. Again Nehemiah was made happy; for the king smiled, as did the queen also, who was sitting near him, and said, How long do you want to be away? When will you return? Nehemiah set a time, and the king consented to let him go.

The king also gave him letters to the rulers of the countries through which he had to pass, asking them not to hinder him, and a letter to the keeper of the forests near Jerusalem, telling him to let Nehemiah have as much timber as he needed. He sent one of his captains and some of the horsemen in the army to see him safely on his way.

So with a thankful heart Nehemiah set out upon his long journey. When they came to Jerusalem, the people gladly welcomed them. At first, however, he did not tell any one what God had put into his heart to do; for he wanted to see for himself just what needed to be done and to find the best way to do it. He was afraid there might be some in the city who would try to interfere with his plans.

One night, after a three days' rest, he rode out of the city by the Valley gate towards a well called the Dragon's Well. He looked closely at the walls as he went along, noticing where they were broken and how much the gates were burned. He rode towards a pool of water called the King's Pool, and from there he had a good view of one side of the city. When he tried to pass to the other side, he found so many broken stones and so much rubbish that he had to walk, and finally he had to turn back and enter the city by the same gate from which he set out.

He had gained much knowledge from that midnight ride, and the next morning he thought out a plan for rebuilding the walls. He decided that the richest people must do the difficult and most costly section, like the corners of towers, while others must do shorter parts near their homes. If all would take hold with a will, there would be little trouble in doing this great work.

Then he called the priests and noblemen and rulers together and told them of what he had been thinking. He reminded them how good the king of Persia had been to let him come to take charge of the work. He spoke so earnestly that they said, Let us rise up and build. There were a few, however, who were not Hebrews and who did not love the city, who, when they heard of what he was to do, laughed and jeered, saying, What a foolish idea! Will you rebel against the king? But Nehemiah wasn't afraid of them, but answered, The God of heaven will help us: so we, His servants, are going to build, and you have no right here.

Then the people went to work with a will. The priests and the goldsmiths, the apothecaries and the merchants, built the sections which were given them by Nehemiah. Even the women in some families helped. Some men worked on the

Fish gate, others on the Horse gate, others on the Tower gate, still others on the Sheep gate, and some on the Gate of the Fountain. No one was discouraged, although the work was hard and they were separated in some cases wide distances from each other.

Then Sanballat, the Horonite, and Tobiah the Ammonite, and Geshem the Arabian, who laughed at them in the beginning, got together again to mock them. What are these feeble Jews trying to do? they said. Will they build a new wall out of old rubbish? Why, if a fox should run upon it, it would tumble down. When they found that no one paid any attention to them, they grew angry and laid a plan to attack the builders.

Then the people prayed to God for help, and Nehemiah set watchmen with spears and swords and bows in the open places of the wall. Each man that worked had his sword girded by his side. Some worked with one hand and held a spear in the other. Nehemiah rode about with a trumpeter beside him, telling them that, if they heard the sound of the trumpet, they must come together for defence. He cheered them on, telling them to remember the Lord who was great and mighty, and, if need be, to fight for their homes, their wives, and their children. So they kept on working and watching from early morning until the stars shone out in the sky.

When Sanballat and Tobiah and Geshem found that the walls were almost done, they sent word to Nehemiah, asking him to meet them in a distant village. But Nehemiah knew that they had some plan to harm him. He sent messengers to them, saying: I am doing a great work, and cannot come to you. Why should I leave it? Sanballat sent his servant four times more, urging him to come, but each time Nehemiah returned the same answer. Then a letter came, saying: "You are building this wall so that you can be king of Judah, and are having your prophets say this to the people. Come now, let us talk this over, and see what can be done about it." Nehemiah sent his messenger again, saying: There are no such things being said. You are making up these stories yourself.

Once more they tried to frighten him by telling him to run

quickly into the temple and shut the door, for men were coming to kill him. But Nehemiah said: Should such a man as I am go into the temple to save his life? I will not go in.

After that Sanballat, Tobiah, and Geshem saw that it was no use to try to do anything more. They had tried all their plans, and had failed. The people kept right on working, and in fifty-two days the walls were finished and the gates set up. And from that time on the Hebrews took fresh courage, and became a stronger people.

XXXV. Four Loyal Captives.

He is the living God, and steadfast for ever, and His kingdom that which shall not be destroyed.—DANIEL vi. 26.

Among the Hebrew captives in Babylon were four clever boys. The king wished to have them brought up in his palace and taught his language, that they might help him govern his great country when they became men; for he knew how wise the Hebrews often became in such matters. These boys wanted to please the king, for he was kind to them and to their fathers and mothers, but they begged the king's steward not to make them eat the rich food or drink the wine from the king's table, as they had been ordered to do. Let us eat our own simple food and drink only water, they said. But you will grow thin and pale, and the king will not like you to be less strong and healthful than the youths of your age, said the steward. Try us ten days, and see if it be so with us, begged Daniel, who was the leader of the others.

The steward consented to this, and at the end of that time they were fatter and fairer than any of the other youths of the king's household. Then they were allowed to keep to their simple fare, and at the end of three years they had become so strong in body and so quick and clear in mind that the king was much pleased with them when they were brought before him. He declared that they knew ten times as much as all the wise men of his realm.

Daniel proved his wisdom by telling the king not only the meaning of his dreams, but what the dreams were when the king himself had forgotten them.

Now this king, whose name was Neb-u-chad-rez-zar, and who was as foolish in some things as he was wise in others, had a great golden statue, more than a hundred feet high, set up in a plain in the province of Babylon. Then he sent word to the princes, the governors, the captains, the judges, and all the rulers of the provinces to come to the dedication of the statue. When they were all gathered together, he sent a herald among them, who cried aloud, O all ye peoples, when ye hear

the sound of the cornet, flute, harp, and all kinds of music, fall down and worship the golden image that the king has set up: who falls not down shall be cast into the midst of a burning fiery furnace.

Now the Hebrew boys, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, who were brought up at the king's court, believed they ought to worship the God of their fathers, and that it was wrong to bow down to an image of any kind, so they did not come with the others to do so. Some of the rulers found this out, and told the king.

He was very angry, and had them brought before him. Is it true that you do not serve my gods nor worship the golden image which I have set up? he said. Now, if you are not ready to do this, when you hear the sound of the music, you shall be cast into the midst of a burning fiery furnace. Then where is the god that will save you?

The three loyal youths replied, We do not need to answer you. If our God is able to save us from the burning fiery furnace, He will do so. But, if not, be it known, O king, that we will not worship the golden image you have set up. When the king heard this, he was furious, and commanded that the furnace should be heated seven times hotter than usual, and that the three young men should be instantly cast into it. They were seized, and bound with ropes and thrown into the midst of the flames, which were so hot that the men who cast them in were themselves burned.

But, wonder of wonders! they walked about in the flames, unharmed. The king was astonished as he looked into the furnace and saw them moving about; and that there was with them a figure like that of an angel or son of the gods. He drew near the door, and called out, Come forth, ye servants of the Most High God. As they came out, all the princes and governors and captains and judges, who quickly surrounded the furnace, saw that their bodies were not burned, nor was a hair of their heads injured, nor did their clothes even smell of fire.

Then the king said, Blessed be the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, who has sent His angel and saved His servants who trusted in Him. And he gave orders that after

this no one should ever speak a word against their God, and he promoted them to higher offices in his kingdom.

Daniel was not put in the burning fiery furnace, but as great a test came to him later on, when he was the chief adviser to another king, whose name was Darius. Because this king trusted him and gave to him greater power than to any other of his officers, the princes and rulers were jealous of him, and laid a plan to injure him. They told the king that they had made a rule that whoever should ask a favor of any god or man, except of the king himself, for thirty days, should be cast into a den of lions. This pleased the vain king, and he signed a writing making this the law.

Now Daniel, although he knew of this rule, kneeled down three times a day, as he had always done, to pray before the open window of his chamber that looked towards Jerusalem. The princes saw him, and told the king. When Darius heard of it, he was not as angry with Daniel as he was with himself, for he saw what a mistake he had made in signing such a decree. He loved Daniel, and wanted to save him, but a king could not change his word, when once given. So he commanded the men to put Daniel into the den of lions, and seal the big stone at the entrance with his own seal, that no one might take it away. The God whom you faithfully serve will save you, he said in parting from Daniel. Oh, how he hoped his words would come true! He could not eat nor sleep nor listen to music, as was his custom. Early the next morning he hurried to the lions' den, crying out in a trembling voice, as he drew near, O Daniel! Daniel! Is thy God able to save thee from the lions?

Then, to his great joy, he heard Daniel's voice saying, O king, live forever. My God sent an angel who shut the lions' mouths, so that they have not hurt me, for he knew that I did thee no harm. The king was glad when he heard this, and gave orders to have Daniel taken out of the lions' den. He was unhurt because he believed in his God.

Then the king commanded that in every part of his kingdom people should fear Daniel's God, for He is the living God, steadfast forever, and His kingdom shall not be destroyed.

XXXVI. An Unwilling Prophet.

For Thou art a gracious God, and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness.—JONAH iv. 2.

Once there was a great city called Nineveh, which was as wicked as it was great, but which the Lord in His goodness wanted to save. He called His prophet Jonah, and told him to go and preach in that city. But Jonah did not want to go; for he did not believe in saving any people who were not of his own race. So he ran over the hills to the seacoast town of Joppa and took ship for Tarshish, thinking thus to get away from his God and the task to which He had called him.

But, when he was well out from shore, a great tempest arose, with strong winds, which drove the water against the ship with such force that it seemed as if it would be broken in two. It would be lifted high on the crest of the waves, and then it would go down into a trough of the sea, with the billows like moving mountains above it. It looked indeed as if it would be swallowed up in the deep, and all would be lost.

The sailors were frightened, and, just as people are apt to do when they are beside themselves with fear, each one began calling out to his god to save him. They thought it must be that some angry god had stirred up the sea against them and that they should do something to stay his wrath and win his good will. They did not know what to do because they did not know whose god it was that sent the trouble.

Jonah had told them that he was running away from his God because he did not want to go to Nineveh, and naturally they thought that his being with them had something to do with the raging of the sea. The captain found him down in the hold of the ship, fast asleep. What means this, that you are asleep in such a storm? shouted the captain. Arise, O sleeper! Call upon thy God, and see if he will think upon us, that we perish not. But Jonah was not in a state of mind for prayer. And what good would it do to pray out there in the sea to a God whose home was back in Judea?

The sailors finally cast lots to see who was the cause of the

evil that had come to them. And, of course, the lot fell on Jonah. They said to him, What shall we do with thee, that the sea may be calm unto us? Jonah answered, Take me up and cast me forth into the sea, so shall it be calm unto you; for I know that for my sake this great tempest is upon you. But the kind-hearted sailors did not want to do this. They rowed hard to bring the vessel to land, but they could not, for the sea wrought and was tempestuous against them.

Then they cried to Jonah's God, We beseech Thee, O Lord, we beseech Thee, let us not perish for this man's life, and lay not upon us innocent blood; for Thou, O Lord, hast done as it pleased Thee. So saying, they threw Jonah overboard into the sea, and at once it stopped its raging.

What do you suppose became of Jonah? He was drowned? No, not so. What then, did a great fish get him? Yes, that is what happened. A great fish swallowed him up; but, strange to say, he did not perish inside the fish. He was there three days and three nights, and while there wrote a beautiful psalm of praise to God for his deliverance, after which God spoke to the fish, and the fish cast Jonah upon dry land.

This was a great experience, with a great lesson for Jonah. He knew now that it was no use to try to go from the presence of the Lord when the Lord had work for him to do, no matter how disagreeable that work might be.

When called a second time to go to Nineveh, he obeyed at once. And, greatly to his surprise, the whole city repented, turned from its evil way, as soon as ever he preached his word in it. The Lord was so pleased at this that He said He would not destroy the city, but would bless it. You would think that this must have made Jonah very happy, too; but no, he was much displeased, was indeed angry, and said to the Lord, It is because I knew that Thou art a gracious God, and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and wouldest not punish those wicked people as they deserve, that I took ship for Tarshish when Thou didst first call me to preach to them. Jonah was so troubled over this that he said he would rather die than live to be a worshiper of a God who would save the heathen as well as the Jew.

The Lord said to him, Do you do well, Jonah, to be angry? This gentle rebuke only made him angrier still. Yes, he replied, I do well to be angry even unto death.

He went out of the city and sat by the wall, waiting to see what would happen; for he felt, as angry people are apt to, that something in accord with his own feeling must take place. As he sat there, sulking, the hot east winds blew upon him, and the sun beat down upon his head until he was ready to faint.

The Lord in pity for him caused a gourd to spring up, that it might cast its shadow over him and shield him from the heat. But at night a worm ate its root, and as soon as the sun came up the next morning the plant withered away. That is just the way it is with this world, said Jonah. As soon as a good thing is done, there is an evil thing to undo it. The gourd is no sooner up than it is cut down. It is better to die than to live.

The Lord said to him, Do you do well to be angry because of the gourd? Again Jonah answered, Yes, I do well to be angry even unto death.

Then said the Lord to him: Thou hast had pity on the gourd, for which thou hast not labored, neither madest it grow, which came up in a night and perished in a night. Should not I spare Nineveh, that great city, wherein there are more than a hundred and twenty thousand people who do not know their right hand from their left, and also many cattle?

Thus the Lord sought to teach Jonah that

“There is a wideness in God’s mercy
Like the wideness of the sea.”

HELPS FOR TEACHERS

HELPS FOR TEACHERS.

Preface.

All in this Helper is by way of suggestion.

Under the head of "Explanation," some thoughts are presented which may help a teacher who has not much time at her command to answer some of the questions that may arise as to the historical setting and purpose of the story. There is so much in the legends not in accord with our modern ways of thinking and speaking that it seems advisable to remind the children repeatedly that they are legends or parables, and not records of facts. If we make them fully understand this, we may be doing both them and the Bible an important service. We do not want even to seem to teach in Sunday School what must be unlearned in day school.

If a child asks, "Is this story true?" meaning did such an event as that described actually happen, and the teacher has to answer, "No," it would be well to add, "But there is a great truth in it," and then emphasize that truth.

There has been no attempt to present the stories with the idea of enforcing a series of thirty-six different virtues or lessons in morals and religion. This could not be done without forcing upon some of the stories ideas quite foreign to them, and such a method would be stilted and artificial in the extreme.

Besides, it is not necessary to have a new lesson subject for each Sunday. It is "line upon line, precept upon precept," that leaves a permanent impression.

Each story has in it different elements, and may suggest thoughts on more than one subject. When two or more lesson topics are mentioned, it is not with the idea that all must be used or that any one of them must be used. To different

minds a story may suggest different lines of thought, and each teacher should be free to choose the lesson in the story which she can present with the best effect.

The first thing to be aimed at is to see that each member of the class knows the story, knows it so well that it can be given in the child's own language. The questions under the head of "Questions" are to make sure that the class knows the main points of the story. Others better than these may occur to the teacher. It is expected, of course, that the teacher will make herself thoroughly familiar with the story as it is in the Bible, and tell it to the class without the book, and as far as possible in Bible language.

The questions and thoughts presented under the head of "Application" are intended to relate the story and its lessons to the life of the children, and let them see what it means or may mean to them. If the truth of a story does not get into their thoughts on the level of their life, it will not do them much good.

It is often easier for a child as well as an adult to get and keep a lesson in verse than in any other form. The poems given should be read to the class, and as many lines as possible committed to memory by the children.

A free use of maps and pictures may increase the interest in the lessons.

C. H. P.

I. The Story of the Beginning.

(GENESIS I.)

Explanation.

Each ancient nation has its creation-story. (See Clodd's *Childhood of Religions*, chapter two.) It is conceded that the Hebrew story is the most beautiful of all. It is a prose-poem which pictures God as working just as a man works. It was written after the Jews had acquired their week of seven days, the last one a day of rest. God does a good bit of work on the first day; He does still better on the second day; better still on the third; and so on till the sixth, when He crowns all

with a being in His own likeness. Then, like a faithful Israelite, He rests on the seventh day.

In the mind of the writer the earth is a flat surface with a solid sky above it where water is stored. There are windows in this firmament which are opened when rain is needed on the earth. While the order of creation is not in accord with that told by modern science, the wonder is not that the difference is so great, but rather that it is so small.

In each, man is the last and best work of the Creator. In each, out of a cloud-mass all things have come, and there is progress from the lower to the higher forms of life. In each, the one God produces all things. Observe that the Bible does not say that God made the world out of nothing, as is so often affirmed. It assumes that the earth-substance exists in the beginning; and the spirit of God moves upon it, bringing order out of chaos, and then peopling both land and water with living creatures.

While the idea of the whole work of creation being done in six days is childlike and contrary to all that we know of Nature's way of doing things, the main thought of the story is true and beautiful, which is that God formed the world and all in it and above it, and it is all good. This is the lesson it has for us. We may also make it speak to our gratitude that we are in it and of it, can think about it, and enjoy its good things. It presents God as a worker. If we would be like Him, we must also be workers. And happy shall we be if we can look back upon all our work, and say, It is good.

Questions.

Who made the world?

How long did it take to make it according to the Bible story? and how long according to science?

What was made on each of the six days in the story?

What did God do on the seventh day?

What does God say of all His work?

What was the great idea in the mind of the writer?

Application.

This is a nature-lesson on a large scale. The first thought is of gratitude that we live in a world so great and so rich in all good things.

"All things bright and beautiful,
All creatures great and small,
And all things wise and wonderful,
The Lord God made them all.

"He gave us eyes to see them,
And lips that we might tell
How great is God Almighty
Who hath made all things well."

We are glad also that we have minds to think about the world and the things in it, though what we know about them is as nothing compared with what we do not know.

"Great, wide, beautiful, wonderful world,
With the wonderful water round you curled,
And the wonderful grass upon your breast,—
World, you are beautifully dressed.

"Ah! you are so great, and I am so small,
I can hardly think of you, World, at all;
And yet, when I said my prayers to-day,
My mother kissed me, and said, quite gay,

"If the wonderful world is great to you,
And great to father and mother, too,
You are more than the earth, though you are such a dot:
You can love and think, and the earth cannot!"

God works all the time. Should we not try to do some good thing every day?

"Lo! Here hath been dawning another blue day:
Think, wilt thou let it slip useless away?"

Can you recall Longfellow's poem, "The Village Blacksmith"?

"Toiling, rejoicing, sorrowing,
Onward through life he goes;
Each morning sees some task begun,
Each evening sees it close,
Something attempted, something done,
Has earned a night's repose."

In what sense can we say that we are in the image of God? If we think good and true thoughts and do good deeds, we may be like Him in character, though not in outward form, as a son may have the spirit and moral traits of his father, though he does not look like him at all. When Jesus said, "Be ye perfect, as your Father in heaven is perfect," he meant that we should be generous and noble in all that we say and do. So should we be like God, who lets His sun shine upon all, both the just and the unjust.

II. A Beautiful Garden.

(GENESIS II., III.)

Explanation.

This second story of creation, beginning at Genesis ii. 4, is much older than the one in the first chapter. The stories are not arranged in the Bible with so much regard to the time when they were written as to the subject treated. Make it clear that this is a purely imaginative account of the way people first lived on earth. The writer was not dealing with facts, but with popular beliefs, though he may have thought that he was stating what had actually occurred when he wrote. We know, of course, nothing of the earliest people, but instead of a beautiful garden it is more likely that their home was a jungle, and that they were wild savages, more uncouth and ignorant than any human beings we see to-day. This idea is not so beautiful as the Bible story, but it is more cheering and inspiring when we think what it means. That story

would have us think that man began in a perfect state and fell into savagery: the other idea is that man began in savagery and has come into his present state of civilization with the hope of a better life still before him. It is better to start low and rise high than to start high and fall to what is low. We are glad to think that man did not begin in Eden, but is on his way to it.

But, while we do not accept the Bible story as true to fact, we find great truths in it. It gives us a high ideal of what men and women should be: they should be so pure that they do not so much as know the meaning of good and evil. They should live as glad and happy companions, with beautiful thoughts and beautiful surroundings. They should live in perfect obedience to God. It was the thought of the writer that their disobedience brought sorrow and trouble into the world. We say that, if people would obey God's laws, the laws of health, of moral purity, and of mental and spiritual growth, they would be happy, and that it is because they do not do this that evils come.

The story shows also that the best of outward conditions are not proof against evil, that the good life is not determined by these so much as it is by what is in the mind or heart. The tempter is in the garden as well as in the jungle. Lessons to be brought out are thankfulness for what God has done for us, and obedience to His laws as the first duty of life. There was everything in the Garden to make Adam and Eve happy,—flowers, fruit, birds to sing to them, animals to amuse them,—and all would have been well if they had obeyed His word instead of listening to the serpent.

Questions.

Do you think man's first home was a garden or a jungle?

Can you tell the story of the Garden of Eden?

What was in the center of it?

How did Adam and Eve feel after they had eaten the forbidden fruit?

Why did they hide themselves away when God called?

What did God do to them?

Application.

Is not God good to us to let us live in such a beautiful world?
Can we not think of it as a great garden full of good things?

“How beautiful it is to be alive!

To wake each morn, as if the Maker's grace

Did us afresh from nothingness derive,

That we might sing, How happy is our case,

How beautiful it is to be alive!”

What does God give to each one of us without the asking? Air, water, sunlight, moonlight, stars, landscapes, birds with their sweet songs and delicate plumage, all Nature's melody and beauty. Are there some things which we cannot have? Yes, poisonous plants and things which injure health or impair life. Do we have to obey God? We could not live if we did not. We not only have to obey God,—that is, live in accord with His laws,—but we have to obey the laws of the nation and the State in which we live. Children have to obey parents and teachers who out of their larger experience of life know better than they what is good for them.

How do we feel when we disobey parents or teachers or do anything that we know is wrong? Perhaps you never do this: let us hope so. But, if you do, do you not feel as if you would like to hide away where no one can see you? If there is something we want which we know we cannot have, is it not better to go away from it and think about something else rather than keep looking at it and wishing that we could have it? If Eve had done this, she would not have taken the forbidden fruit. When we do a wrong thing, is it not a still greater wrong to accuse others and try to make them answer for our act? In this Adam does not appear very noble. Does not all wrong-doing bring punishment? Whatsoever we sow, that shall we reap.

Can we make a beautiful garden of our lives?

“Kind hearts are the gardens;

Kind thoughts are the roots;

Kind words are the blossoms;

Kind deeds are the fruits.”

III. The Two Brothers.

(GENESIS IV.)

Explanation.

It is possible that some old-time quarrel between shepherds and farmers over their offerings to God gave rise to this story. It does not tell us how the offerings were made or how God accepted one and rejected the other, or why He did this. Nothing is said about an altar, though one is implied.

All new departures or advances in life, and especially in religion, are opposed by those who think the old way good enough and are afraid there may be evil in the new way. The Hebrews were nomads before they were tillers of the soil, and, as animal sacrifices were the first to be made, it was believed that no other kind could be acceptable to God. To think that He would accept a shock of wheat or barley or a basket of fruit in place of a lamb was little better than blasphemy. But eventually the tillers of the soil supplanted the wandering herdsmen. Verily, Cain slew Abel.

This may be the meaning of the story. It may have grown out of the conflicts of the early Hebrews, who were nomads, with the Canaanites, who lived a more settled life. But we are not concerned with it as history. If we were, it would present many difficulties. We could not tell how Cain found a wife or builded a city or why he should be afraid of people, when he and his father and mother were the only people in the world. But as a story, made up as it evidently was of other stories, these things do not trouble us.

We see Cain coming to the altar with surly countenance, and presenting a gift which God does not accept because, we may suppose, his heart is not right. He is jealous of his brother. God warns him against keeping such feelings in his heart. If he keeps such sin there, it will become his master, and make him do things that will blast his life and make him miserable ever after. But Cain does not heed the voice. The ugly feeling comes to fruit in a terrible deed.

Then is the punishment swift and sure. God is not mocked.

Whatsoever we sow, that shall we reap. The evasive cry, Am I my brother's keeper? will not still the troubled conscience. Wherever Cain goes, that goes with him, and all things cry out against him.

The story may suggest for lessons the offerings that are acceptable to God (see poem under Application), the effect of keeping in us bad thoughts and feelings and the punishment which the wrong-doing brings.

Questions.

Can you tell the story of Cain and Abel?

What is an acceptable offering to God?

What did Jesus say about bringing gifts to the altar? (Matthew v. 23.)

Is it ever right to keep feelings of hate or jealousy in the heart?

What did such feelings lead Cain to do?

What was his punishment?

Application.

How should children play together in the home and on the playground? If we are selfish and try to get all the best toys or games for ourselves, or will not play unless we can have our own way in everything, can we be really happy? Do we not rather destroy our own pleasure as well as that of others? Selfishness was at the bottom of all Cain's unhappiness. It is at the bottom of most, if not all, the unhappiness of the world. The more we have our own way without thought of others, the more we want it and expect it, and the more miserable we are if we cannot have it. Ought we not to be glad that others have good things even if we cannot have them ourselves? How about our tempers? Are we better than wild beasts if we let bad feelings and thoughts be our masters, so that we say and do things which hurt others?

"Angry words! oh, let them never
From the tongue unbridled slip
May the heart's best impulse ever
Check them ere they soil the lip."

Love is the great thing in religion as it is in life.

"O brother man, fold to thy heart thy brother!
Where pity dwells, the peace of God is there;
To worship rightly is to love each other,
Each smile a hymn, each kindly deed a prayer."

If Cain had brought a loving heart to God, his offering would have been accepted; but no one can worship God while in a bad temper or when thinking evil thoughts about others. In such a mood, everything seems to be against us, as it was against Cain. But, when we are in a good temper and have kindly feelings for all, then everything seems to be for us; and it is a joy to worship or to work. When our hearts are right, then our offering is acceptable to God.

"Lord, what offering shall we bring
At thine altars when we bow?
Hearts, the pure unsullied spring
Whence the kind affections flow;
Willing hands to lead the blind,
Bind the wounded, feed the poor;
Love, embracing all our kind;
Charity, with liberal store."

When we bring our pennies to Sunday School for a good purpose, that is an acceptable offering. So, when we say a little prayer of thanks for all good things, if we feel what we say, it is true worship.

"Can a little child like me
Thank the Father fittingly?
Yes, oh, yes! be good and true,
Patient, kind in all you do;
Love the Lord, and do your part;
Learn to say with all your heart,
Father, we thank Thee."

IV. The Great Flood.

(GENESIS VI.-X.)

Explanation.

Read the different accounts of the flood. Flood stories are common in the folk-lore of ancient peoples. They are found even in South America, Mexico, and in the Arctic Circle. The one in Genesis is so much like the one in Babylonian writings that it is thought the Hebrews got it from either Babylonia or Assyria. In Greece, Persia, India, and Chaldea it appears in its completer form.

We are to think of it simply as a nature myth, showing us how people in the olden time thought God rewarded goodness and punished the world for its wickedness. It is good to live in an age that does not think of God as becoming angry and sending floods or earthquakes or any other catastrophe to punish people for wrong-doing. When such things happen, we know that it is in obedience to natural laws, about which the writers in Genesis knew nothing.

It is an unworthy thought of God that pictures Him as being sorry that He made man and deciding to drown the world for His sake; but it is a worthy thought of God which pictures Him as caring above all things for righteousness. Why is Noah chosen to build the ark? Because he was "righteous and perfect in his generation." For this reason he found grace in the eyes of the Lord. He was industrious and faithful. When others questioned and laughed, he kept at his task, and did what God told him to do. Note how thoroughly the ark was built.

His first act on leaving the ark was to build an altar and offer a sacrifice of thanksgiving to God for His goodness to him. This shows his piety and his gratitude.

The writer did not know how the rainbow is made, but it is a beautiful thought that God placed it in the sky as a sign that He would keep His agreement with His faithful worshipers and would never again curse the earth for man's sake. It may be that the man who added the rainbow to the flood story had risen above the cruder thought of God in the story itself.

Explain how the rainbow is made by the sun shining through the mist or water in the sky, which deflects its rays and brings out the colors,—red, orange, yellow, green, blue, indigo, violet,—just as a prism does. (Take a prism into the class, if convenient.)

The lessons which may be drawn from the story are: walking with God,—that is, doing His will or what is right; faithfulness and obedience,—Noah did what God told him to do, and did his work well; God cares only for goodness,—He drowns the world because it is not good.

Questions.

Why did God decide to drown the world?

Why did He choose Noah to build the ark?

How was the ark built?

Who and what went into it?

How did Noah find out that the land was dry?

What was the first thing Noah did after leaving the ark?

What did God put into the sky after the flood was over? and why did He put it there?

Application.

How can we “walk with God”? By keeping His laws and by loving all things that He has made, both great and small. What is it to keep His laws?

Is God in the floods, tempests, earthquakes, as well as in the rainbow, the stars, or the flowers?

“Thy love is in the sunshine’s glow,
Thy life is in the quickening air;
When lightnings flash and storm-winds blow,
There is Thy power; Thy law is there.”

Can we not build an ark of safety for ourselves out of pure thoughts and good deeds?

“Some day, little ones, you’ll be children no longer,
But what you are now will ever be part
Of what you shall be, and stronger and stronger
The seed of the future still grows in each heart.”

Then fill your young lives full of sunshine and beauty,
 Think purely, speak kindly, act nobly each day;
 With glad, willing hearts do each little duty,
 That, when childhood is gone, its sweetness may stay."

Does not a boy show true manliness when he does the work given him to do, either in the home or the school, regardless of what others may say or do? To be always thinking of what others may think or say of us, or fearing that we may be laughed at, especially when we do some good thing to please our parents or teacher, is weakness. We never do anything as it should be done when we work in that way. He who goes ahead and does what he knows is right, whether others praise or blame him, wins the most respect and trust from his playfellows and all others in the end.

The girl who is not ashamed to do work about the house, or care for the baby brother or sister, or to go on errands when other girls are about, and thinks more of doing her work well than of what they may say, has the true spirit of independence, and is sure to win the love and praise most worth having.

Noah did his work thoroughly, making the ark within and without according to the pattern shown him of God. And do you not like this saying of Adam Bede, that "a good solid bit of work lasts; if it is only laying a floor down, somebody is the better for its being done well, besides the man who does it"?

Ruskin said a man built a lie into the wall of one of the noble buildings of Venice, and that lie caused the wall to fall. He meant that the workman did not do his work well. He cheated, and his cheating ruined the whole building. Because the work was slighted in the machinery of a great ship, several hundred people lost their lives at sea.

"In the elder days of Art,
 Builders wrought with greatest care
 Each minute and unseen part;
 For the gods see everywhere.

"Let us do our work as well,
Both the unseen and the seen;
Make the house, where gods may dwell,
Beautiful, entire, and clean."

Will not the thought that we have done the best we could in whatever we undertake be as a beautiful rainbow in our sky?

V. The Father of a People.

(GENESIS XII.-XV.)

Explanation.

This story differs from the others we have had in having less in it that is purely mythical. While it does not give us real history, it may have a basis of reality. Patriarch means father-ruler, or chief of the tribe. The Hebrews have always prized highly the legends about the early chiefs, or leaders of their race, and especially this one about Abraham, representing him as starting them on the way to their higher thought of God. Long before any part of the Bible was written, he was glorified as their great hero and father of the people. In the Bible he is referred to as "Father Abraham," "the Father of the Faithful," "the Friend of God."

While we do not think of the Hebrew patriarchs as ideal men, we find noble traits in their character, and the thought of God and of the way men should deal with each other ascribed to them was high and good, when we consider the age that produced it. Sometimes a tribe is spoken of as a person and pictured as doing what a single individual would do. In dealing with this kind of literature, it is useless to ask the question, Did this or that thing really happen as stated?

The same impulse that drove Columbus over the ocean and brought the Pilgrims to settle in New England was in Abraham when he left the home land, and went out seeking a new and better country where he could worship God according to the dictates of his own conscience. Trace the journey on the map. Begin with the long journey of his father Terah from Ur in Chaldea (near the mouth of the Euphrates River)

up to Haran; Abraham's journey from there through Syria south-west to his probable various halting places,—Bethel, Shechem, Hebron, Beersheba, etc.

Dwell on the generosity and courtesy of Abraham in his treatment of Lot. The strife among the herdsmen of the two tribes was common, as in the case of some Western ranches. So also was the plundering of tribes, as in the case of Lot. Note the goodness and bravery of Abraham in going to the rescue and refusing to take pay for what he did. His piety and thankfulness were shown in the customary way of building an altar and offering a sacrifice.

Questions.

Why did Abraham leave Haran?

To what land did he go?

Why did Abraham and Lot separate?

What did Abraham say to Lot?

What happened to Lot?

What did Abraham do for the king of Sodom for which he would not receive pay?

Application.

Have we such faith in God, in truth and right, that we are ready to do whatever He tells us to do, even when we cannot see what good is to come from it? Such as learning our lessons at school, doing what our parents tell us to do, even if we do not like to do it. How does God lead us? Is it not in thinking good thoughts and cherishing feelings of love and good will?

The impulse to do what is right is God's call to us. Can you tell what Theodore Parker's mother said to him when, as a boy of four summers, he asked her what it was in him that told him it was wrong to strike a tortoise? "Some men call it conscience, but I prefer to call it the voice of God in the soul of man. If you listen and obey it, then it will speak clearer and clearer, and always guide you right; but, if you turn a deaf ear or disobey, then it will fade out little by little, and leave you all in the dark and without a guide. Your life depends on heeding this little voice."

"I little see, I little know,
 Yet can I fear no ill;
 He who hath guided me till now
 Will be my Leader still.
 No burden yet was on me laid,
 Of trouble or of care,
 But He my trembling step hath stay'd
 And given me strength to bear.

"Upon His providence I lean,
 As lean in faith I must;
 The lesson of my life hath been
 A heart of grateful trust.
 And so my onward way I fare,
 With happy heart and calm,
 And mingle with my daily care
 The music of my psalm."

Abraham was a peacemaker. What did Jesus say about the peacemakers? How can we be peacemakers? By saying and doing the kindest things in the kindest way. When we hear harsh words spoken, a pleasant word or look may check them. "A soft answer turneth away wrath" (Proverbs xv. 1). Ought we to expect pay for doing good deeds? On the contrary, does it not make us feel ashamed if we think others expect us to accept money for kind acts?

A mother once said: "My boy expects pay for everything. I shall have to pay him to breathe soon." Is not that a bad state to be in? Is it not nobler to think of what we can do for others and give them than of what we can get them to do for us?

"We might all of us give far more than we do
 Without being a bit the worse;
 It was never yet loving that emptied the heart,
 Nor giving that emptied the purse."

VI. A Great Trial.

(GENESIS XVIII., XXII.)

Explanation.

Picture Abraham sitting at the door of his tent under the trees in the heat of the day, thinking of what was often in his mind, and that was as to who should take his place as ruler of the tribe when he was gone. He had dreamed of the tribe becoming a great and mighty people, like the stars in heaven in number, and it was a sore disappointment to him to think that he had no son to continue his name and make his hopes come true. It looked as if his old servant would have to be chief after his death. When the son is born to him, doubt gives way to faith and boundless joy. The story is true to the law of fiction,—“It is always darkest just before dawn.”

Angels were old-time deities who had lost their worshipers and were reduced to the rank of attendants upon the supreme God. Angels as spirits with white wings flitting through the air are creations of later thought. Explain that God was not thought of as being far off, but as living on the hill-tops or in the sky just overhead, and could easily come down, and, like a man, mingle with His worshipers. People did not then draw hard and fast lines between what came to them in their waking hours and in their sleep. If anything, they thought what they dreamed was the more sure word of God.

Human sacrifices were once common. It was believed that God would be pleased with nothing less than what was dearest to His worshipers. We still hear ignorant people say that God has taken away their children because they loved them so much. Make it clear that what is in the mind prompting the deed is more important than the deed itself. God requires a whole-hearted devotion. Tell the story of the sacrifice of Iphigenia in Greek mythology. Agamemnon prepares to sacrifice his daughter Iphigenia, who, however, is delivered at the last moment by the goddess Diana providing a hind.

Dwell upon the Oriental custom of hospitality. Abraham goes out to welcome the strangers, and is only the more eager

to please when he finds that they are divine beings. Observe how primitive is the idea that God and His angels eat cakes like men; but observe also that Abraham gives them the best that he has. In this he shows the same spirit as when he is called to sacrifice Isaac. His only thought is to serve and give refreshment and pleasure to his guests.

Questions.

- Who came to Abraham's tent? and how did he receive them?
- What did they tell him would happen?
- What does sacrifice mean?
- What did God tell Abraham to do?
- Why did He tell him to do this?
- Does God care more for the spirit in the deed than for the deed itself?

Application.

How does God visit us? He comes in all good and true thoughts. He is always with us, He is in all things, only we are not always conscious of His presence. Should we not always be kind to strangers? It is not necessary to take them into our homes, as public houses are provided; but we should give them kindly greetings and make them feel at home while they are with us. When a new family comes into our part of the town, and the children come either to our week-day school or to our Sunday School, we should welcome them in such a way that they will be at ease and happy in our company. We should invite them to our homes and let them share with us our good things.

"The beauty of the house is order;
The blessing of the house is contentment;
The glory of the house is hospitality;
The crown of the house is godliness."

Do we have to make sacrifices? There are many things we want to do to every one that we can do; we have, therefore, to choose the one thing we will do and sacrifice all the rest. Then we have to choose between pleasure and duty and between what is right and what is wrong. We must "remember that duty, not pleasure, must lead, and try every day to be perfect,

indeed." In times of war, God requires that parents give their sons for the defence of their country. All through life we have to make sacrifices for truth, for righteousness, for the welfare of those whose lives are bound up with our own. Sometimes we have to do the thing that is hardest and sacrifice what is dearest, that justice may be done, that the good of all be secured.

"I give you a motto, my little child,
To take with you everywhere,—
Into the play world, into the real world,
Into the world of care.

"Not the things that I like to do,
But the things that are right to do,
Not everything that I want to do,
But whatever I ought to do.

"This is the way to be good and great,
This is the way to master your fate,
This is the beautiful, blessed way
That will make you glad at the end of the day.

"Not the things that I like to do,
But the things that are right to do,
Not everything that I want to do,
But whatever I ought to do."

VII. A Happy Marriage.

(GENESIS XXIV.)

Explanation.

In this story we see how brides were secured for young men in Hebrew times. The whole matter is arranged by the fathers or nearest male relatives, the mothers and the young people themselves having little or nothing to say about it. This is still the fashion in Oriental countries. In India, for example, the parents often decide the marriage question for their children when they are very young, and the young

man never sees the face of the one who is to be his wife until after they are married.

In the story, as Abraham is too old and feeble to make the journey to the country where he thinks there may be a suitable bride for his son of their own race, he commits the whole matter to his faithful servant, Eliezer. Trace the route of Eliezer on the map from Beersheba northward either by the seacoast or the Jordan River to Damascus, then across the Euphrates to Haran. Picture the caravan, the ten camels bearing the presents for the bride and her people and all things necessary for the journey,—how unlike anything we see in America to-day!

Note the custom of the young women coming at evening to the well to draw water for the household. Dwell upon the faithfulness of Eliezer, and that the good and kind heart of Rebekah appeals to him as well as her physical beauty. Observe that the first duty of the East is hospitality to strangers, and that the first duty of the host is to have water brought for the washing of the dusty feet. Probably the cordiality of Laban was not lessened because of the rich gifts of his guest. The latter is not asked his errand. That would not be in accord with Oriental ideas of politeness; but Eliezer is full of his subject, and will not eat until he has done the thing he was sent to do.

Observe also how carefully the camels are cared for. See also the thoughtful Isaac meditating in the field at eventide. Dwell upon his love for his mother and for Rebekah, in whose love he found comfort after his mother's death.

Lessons that may be drawn from the story are, love, hospitality, faithfulness, kindness to animals.

Questions.

Where did Eliezer go?

Why did he go?

What did he take with him?

How was he received in Haran?

With what was he most pleased in the character and conduct of Rebekah?

Was Isaac well pleased with what the faithful servant had done for him?

Application.

Should we be willing to go on errands? How should we do them? Is there not joy in feeling that others can trust us, in the thought that they will be pleased when we do our work well? Is it not better to do more rather than less than is expected of us?

How should we treat those who serve us? Eliezer was regarded with honor as well as confidence, as if he were one of the family. Should we be ashamed to serve?

"It is pleasant to laugh and have lots of fun,
To merrily frolic and play;
But that child is truly the happiest one
Who can add to all this a good deed done
When the night shuts out the day."

Is it not better to have a kind heart than a beautiful face?
Can any one be truly beautiful who is not good?

"What is the law of thy beauty? I asked of the drop of dew
That hung in the plume of the daisy that leaned o'er the violets blue;
And in crystal thoughts it said to me, Do thy duty, and thou shalt see."

State some of the ways in which we can serve one another and show kindness to animals and all the creatures that God has made.

"He prayeth best who loveth best
All things both great and small;
For the dear Lord who loveth us,
He hath made and loveth all."

VIII. Getting a Blessing.

(GENESIS XXVII.)

Explanation.

In this story we see two boys growing up in the same family as unlike as two brothers can well be. One is rough, ruddy, and thoughtless, caring chiefly for the wild life of field and forest, and never so happy as when following the chase. He is his father's favorite. The other is smooth, cautious, quiet,

ever thinking of what he may get for himself. He is his mother's favorite.

To the first, Esau, the elder, would fall, according to the ancient custom, the right to rule as head of the family when the father is gone. The first-born son may, however, sell this birthright to another. Esau's mind is not on such things. He had rather think and talk about the last buck that he brought down with his arrow. Brother Jacob, on the contrary, has his mind on the birthright a great deal, and is wondering how he can get it from his brother.

When Esau comes in from the hunt so hungry that he can hardly contain himself, and asks Jacob for the delicious pot-tage that he has made for himself, and Jacob answers, Will you give me your birthright for it? he answers, Yes, I will give you anything. What do I care about a birthright? I may be dead to-morrow.

The man who is constantly thinking and looking for the chance to get what he wants is the man who generally wins, while the man who is careless, thoughtless, and acts upon the impulse of the moment is the man who commonly loses. It was a case of cunning against impulse, and cunning got the prize. We cannot admire the character of either in this matter.

In the case of getting the blessing, the cunning of Jacob and his mother has become deceit and fraud, and Esau is deprived of all that his father has to give him. When he realizes what has happened, he is angry, and declares he will kill his brother the first chance he gets. To save his life, the deceiver has to leave home. So the brothers are separated. Jacob got the birthright and the blessing; but what good did they do him? See the results of this scheming:

The father's heart is broken; Rebekah, who planned the deception, loses the companionship of her favorite son, and Esau is made so violent with wrath that he is ready to kill his brother, and Jacob has to leave all to save his life. Blessings ill-gotten prove to be curses. The "blessing" was, and is to this day, regarded by the Israelites as a sacred thing.

There was thought to be in it some hidden power favorable

to one's prospects in life, just as the "cursing" was supposed to exercise a bad effect on one's lot. When trouble comes, ignorant people still fear that an evil-disposed person or spirit has put a "spell" upon them. Happy is the man who is free from all such thoughts! But "blessings" that mean good will and good wishes are good things to have.

Not by intention, but by suggestion, the story teaches that it never pays in the long run to deceive. When by fraud we get what we think is the better end of a bargain, it proves to be the worse. We cheat ourselves when we cheat others. Harm is done to all.

Questions.

What was the character of Esau? of Jacob?

How did Jacob get Esau's birthright?

How did he get the father's blessing which should have gone to Esau?

Did it make him or anybody else happy after he got it?

In cheating his brother, did he not cheat himself?

Is it not better to deserve a blessing and lose it than to get a blessing and not deserve it?

Application.

It was silly and short-sighted in Esau to sell his birthright for a single dinner; but do we not show the same spirit when we overeat or play too hard or sit up late at night, depriving ourselves of the blessing of health and cheer by so doing? We sell our great future good for a little present good. Some men are so foolish or have so little control of themselves that for the momentary pleasure of a glass of wine or beer they sell all the present and future good of themselves and their families.

With a silly idea of what is manly, some boys will smoke cigarettes, though told that it will injure their health and strength. They are no wiser than Esau, who for a mess of pottage sold his birthright. Both boys and girls will sometimes sell the friendship and good will of playmates for the pleasure of indulging a bad temper or saying smart and sharp things. What did Jesus say about the man who would sell

his soul for the world? Of what use would the world be to him after his soul was gone? Can we get the best things in life by any kind of bargaining?

“We cannot make bargains for blisses,
Nor catch them like fishes in nets;
And sometimes the thing our life misses
Helps more than the thing which it gets.
For good lieth not in pursuing,
Nor gaining of great nor of small;
But just in the doing, and doing
As we would be done by, is all.”

It was bad of Esau to sell his birthright for so small a thing, but it was still worse for Jacob to take advantage of his brother's hunger and impulsive nature, and get it from him as he did. It led on to the still meaner thing of deceiving the father and getting the blessing. Is not this the way of life, one bad thought or deed leading on to others worse than itself?

“He who speaks with lying tongue
Adds to wrong a greater wrong.
Then with courage true and strong
Always speak the truth.”

Do you think if you were to deceive your father or mother or your brother or sister or anybody else, and got something which did not really belong to you, you would be happy in the thought of having it? Could you look into the eyes of the one deceived without a sense of shame?

Does not the boy who cheats in his lessons cheat himself more than he does the teacher? He loses the power, the mastery, the mental growth, which it is the purpose of education to give. Does not the one who cheats in a game spoil the game? Is not the boy who is always ready for a “swap” with other boys that he may “get the best of the bargain” on the way to become a Jacob in life? What kind of a world would this be if all were deceivers, so that no one could be trusted?

What is the best kind of a blessing? and what is the surest way to get it? Do you think the Golden Rule applies here?

IX. Seeking a Fortune.

(GENESIS XXVIII., XXIX.)

Explanation.

In this story two or three old legends are blended in one. As it stands in the Bible, two reasons are given for Jacob's leaving home. One is that he is afraid of Esau; the other is that he went away to get a wife who should be of the same race as his mother, and not a Canaanite, like the wives of Esau, "who were a grief of mind unto Isaac and Rebekah" (Genesis xxvi. 35).

His dream at Bethel is introduced to account for the fact that there was an ancient altar there, a favorite shrine of the faithful. The vision of the heavenly ladder, with angels running up and down on it, and God standing at the head of it, shows that the firmament on which God and the angels lived was not thought to be far from the earth. The idea of Jacob making a bargain with God, agreeing to be His worshiper if He will do certain things for him, is also very primitive.

Sacred stones, trees, and hill-tops were common with the Hebrews, as with all other early peoples. It was the custom to anoint with oil not only priests and kings, but stones and other objects of worship. There was no thought of God as everywhere, but He would be at certain places at certain times where His worshipers could meet Him. We still hear people speak of God as if He were with them at certain times and in certain experiences in a different sense from the thought of His constant presence.

The scene at the well in Haran seems simple and natural, save the extraordinary strength of the gentle Jacob after love entered his heart. To some this may seem no miracle. The union of piety and morals was not very close at that time. The cheatings of Jacob and those of his father-in-law, Laban, do not seem to be considered by God at all. He is satisfied if they acknowledge Him as God, and are not remiss in tithes and offerings. We are not to think of any of these characters as ideal or of their religion as perfect. We are not to look for perfection, but to see the beauty in the old-time crudity.

The picture of Jacob working seven years for Rachel, while they seem to him but a little time because of his love for her, is the heart of the story. We are inclined to pity him when Leah is given him in place of the beautiful Rachel, and another seven years of service are before him. But it does not say that he had to wait seven years for her. He may have taken her the next day, and with her as his companion served that time. He was in no hurry to leave this new home. And not until he has won the object of his going there and secured for himself a fortune does he do so. The lesson we may draw from it is the power of love to change time into life. Time is not when we are doing what we love to do, or when a great purpose or pure love fills the heart.

Questions.

Why did Jacob go to Haran?

What did he do at Bethel?

Did he think of God as being in all places?

How long did he serve for Rachel, and why did the time seem short to him?

Did Laban deal justly with him?

What do you find in his character to admire?

Application.

What makes the lily grow and the star shine? What gives order and beauty to the heavens, and "light and life to all this wondrous world we see"? To the Power that does all this we give the name God. Where is He? He is in the sky, in the earth, in churches, in schools, in homes, in minds and hearts,—He is everywhere.

"The Lord is in His holy place
In all things near and far!
Shekinah of the snowflake, He,
And glory of the star.

"He hides Himself within the love
Of those whom we love best;
The smiles and tones that make our homes
Are shrines by Him possessed.

“He tents within the lonely heart
 And shepherds every thought;
 We find Him not by seeking long,—
 We lose Him not, unsought.”

Why do people go to church to worship Him? Is it because they cannot do it anywhere else? No, it is because they can do together and with the help of services better what they can do anywhere each by himself. When many minds are set to one end, that end is more easily reached. We help one another in the things of the spirit as in other matters. In what spirit should we come to church and Sunday School? Is the bed-time prayer a pleasant thought to you? Did you know that these verses from a famous hymn were suggested by this experience of Jacob?

“Though like a wanderer,
 The sun gone down,
 Darkness be over me,
 My rest a stone,
 Yet in my dreams I'd be
 Nearer, my God, to Thee,
 Nearer to Thee.

“Then, with my waking thoughts
 Bright with Thy praise,
 Out of my stony griefs
 Bethel I'll raise;
 So by my woes to be
 Nearer, my God, to Thee,
 Nearer to Thee.”

What makes the work-time or the study-time pass quickly? In play, when you forget all about self and enter into what you are doing with all your mind and strength, are you not surprised, when the time has come to stop, that the hour or the afternoon is gone? A book that interests you makes an hour seem not much more than a minute.

So, when our hearts are in what we are doing, a day, a year, or a lifetime, goes before we know it. If we are interested

in the best things, we change time into the best kind of life. Is not a life full of high thoughts, noble feelings, and generous deeds the best fortune that one can have? Is not such life worth more than all the rest of the world without it?

X. Back to the Old Home.

(GENESIS XXXI.-XXXIII.)

Explanation.

In this, as in so many of the Hebrew stories, we have two or more legends woven together. In one, Laban was the cheater; in the other, Jacob. The writer seems to exult in the cunning of both. Cheating seems to have been a family trait. Even Rachel is not above deceiving her father after having stolen his idols. Yet all are on familiar terms with God, and He has no rebuke for these sharp practices. This shows us that we have not here a very high form of religion. But this side of early Hebrew life is to be noted, but not dwelt upon. If we were to judge the legendary characters of any ancient nation by the standards of to-day, we could not have a very high opinion of them.

Jacob is not long in the service of Laban before he becomes the chief manager of his affairs, and by thrift and shrewdness makes Laban rich beyond anything that he had dreamed. But, after he has served fourteen years for Leah and Rachel, he thinks it is time to look out for himself. So he makes a bargain with his father-in-law, and soon has the greater part of his wealth in his own hands.

This makes the sons of Laban jealous and suspicious of him. They complain to their father, and his countenance is changed towards Jacob. With this feeling kindled against him, the latter realizes that it is not safe for him to stay longer in this land. Just as his cheating made it necessary for him to leave his old home, now it makes it necessary for him to leave his new home. So, when Laban is away looking after his sheep-shearing, he steals away with his family and possessions.

While Laban has given him his daughters for fourteen years' service, still he has authority as head of the tribe to take them from him, if he will; and at first he is minded to do this, when he hears of Jacob's flight, and with his men starts out in pursuit of the fugitive. But, before he overtakes him, he changes his mind. It will not be well or safe for him to have a quarrel with so keen and subtle a person as Jacob.

So, when they come together, they make an agreement of peace, and set up a stone monument as a witness to their agreement and as a boundary mark between them. Then they eat together, and say the beautiful Mizpah blessing,—“The Lord watch between me and thee, when we are absent one from another.” This parting of Laban and Jacob is one of the finest passages in all the patriarch legends.

As Jacob had a dream with a vision of God on his way to Haran, so he has another on his return. Again we see what was the ancient thought of God,—a big man who could wrestle with His worshiper. This idea of gods contending with men was a familiar one with the Greeks and other early races. (See story of Diomedé.) The good thing about Jacob is that he will not let go wrestling, though he is maimed in the struggle, until he has won a blessing, and is crowned victor with a new name, “Israel,” or “Prince of God.”

Though Jacob has been from the land of his birth twenty years, his conscience still troubles him. He has not forgotten how he deceived Esau, and he is afraid Esau has not forgotten it, either. The wronged brother has become rich and strong, and it may be more unsafe for him in the land of his birth than in Haran.

He resorts to the common practice of winning favor with presents. But what is his surprise to find that the frank, impulsive, open-hearted brother has forgotten all about the old wrong and receives him with open arms and kisses! It is ever thus with the generous mind: it remembers injuries only to forgive them.

Lessons to be drawn from the story are the evil effects of cunning and cheating; the fears which conscience awakens in the mind that cannot forget its wrong-doing; the blessing

that comes from wrestling; and the forgiving spirit of a generous mind.

Questions.

Why did Jacob leave Haran?

Why did Laban pursue him? And what agreement did they make?

With whom did he wrestle in his dream the night before meeting Esau?

What blessing did he receive from the wrestling?

How did Esau receive him?

Which of the two brothers showed the nobler mind?

Application.

What is the best way to settle a quarrel? Do we gain anything by loud talk? By each accusing the other of wrongdoing? By showing bad temper? By saying, You have done a mean thing to me, I'll do something worse to you? This is the spirit that makes strife and war.

If you think some one has wronged you, would it not be better to go to him and say in a quiet way just as you would to a friend: Let us think this thing over together, and see just what there is to it. You do not want to be unkind to me, nor do I to you. If either of us has made a mistake, let us see if we cannot set it right. Is not this the way of peace? Can you tell the parable of The Two Handles, by Epictetus? If all were to live according to the Golden Rule, would there be any quarrelling?

"The golden rule, the golden rule,

Oh, that's the law for me!

Were this the law for all the world,

How happy we should be!"

Can you think of any blessings that come from wrestling? Once it was a favorite sport for boys and men. Now football and other games have taken its place. It gave strength and quickness of motion to the body. Did it also quicken the mind? How about the things we have to struggle for in life? When you wrestle with a hard lesson, what do you get? What when you wrestle with a hard duty, or with a bad habit? What when you do things that you do not like to do? How

is it with troubles, as when you are not allowed to go where you want to go nor to do what you want to do? Out of things hard to bear do we not sometimes get our highest good? Do we not thus "see God face to face"?

"There's many a battle fought daily
The world knows nothing about;
There's many a brave little soldier
Whose strength puts a legion to rout.
And he who fights sin single-handed
Is more of a hero, I say,
Than he who leads soldiers to battle
And conquers by arms in the fray."

Is it a good idea to try to win the good will of another by gifts? If we have hurt the feelings of another, do we not wound them still more by trying to heal them with a present? Is not the "gift without the giver bare"?

XI. A Coat of Many Colors.

(GENESIS XXXVII.—XXXIX.)

Explanation.

This story is one of many which grew up to explain why the Israelites lived for a time under Egyptian rule in the land of Goshen. They had no written records of such experience, and, when the Bible accounts were written, no one could tell just what happened in the earlier time, as there were no facts to guide one. If we were asked whether Joseph was sold by his brothers to the Ishmaelites or stolen by the Midianites and sold by them, we could not say, for the Bible states both ways as facts. This means that the writer in bringing two or more traditions together did not stop to make his final story altogether consistent with itself.

The Nile Valley was a fertile land, producing, it was said, grain enough for the whole world. The tribes living on the borders of the Arabian desert were often subject to drought and famine, and at such times they would go to Egypt for supplies. Sometimes the whole tribe would move in that

direction and remain where they could exchange their flocks and herds for grain.

The tribes that came near enough to be of service to Egypt the government would sometimes hold as allies or wards or slaves, dealing with them as the strong generally deal with the weak. At some period in their wanderings the Israelites found themselves in or near Egypt, and the Joseph and Moses stories are legends that grew out of the experience of that time. In all narratives where angels and dreams abound we may be perfectly sure that we are not to deal with facts, but with fancies.

The picture of Bedouin life in this story is very realistic. We can easily see in our mind's eye the old man Jacob in his tent, and Joseph going out to see how well the brothers are minding the flocks and herds with the idea of reporting their doings to the father. What they do to him is what could be easily imagined of that kind of life. The feelings of the brothers concerning the favorite son and of the father when they tell him what they have done to his favorite are natural feelings, and the scenes and acts seem, as we say, true to life.

It is always unfortunate to have a favorite in the family, unless it be one who endears himself to all by his lovable qualities. We can easily understand the jealousy of the brothers. We say it is wrong to have such feelings, but it is still worse to give occasion for them. The experience of Joseph should teach us that we should not think of ourselves more highly than we ought to think.

What Shakespeare said of a good name we may say of modesty: "It is the immediate jewel of the soul." The danger of conceit and tale-bearing, of partiality in the home, of keeping the feeling of jealousy and hate in the heart, are some of the lessons that may be drawn from this story.

Questions.

What kind of a boy was Joseph?

Where did he go? And why did he go there?

What did the brothers do to him?

Which one wanted to save his life?

Who took him into Egypt?

What did he do there?

Application.

What is your feeling towards boys and girls who seem to think that they are smarter or better than they are? Did it ever occur to you that, when you are inclined to boast of what you have said or done or to say "I" many times in conversation, you give others reason to have the same kind of feeling towards you? If we think of ourselves more highly than we ought to think, we are apt to make others think of us less highly than they ought to think. While we do not admire shyness, true modesty always wins respect. Whatever you do, don't boast, don't try to say smart things, don't tell stories or dreams in which you are yourself the hero. If you have good in you, never fear but what others will find it out.

Why don't we like the boys or girls who like to tell of the bad deeds of others? Is it not because we feel that they like to do it, that they themselves may be thought better than others? Often they do it not to correct faults, but to make trouble for those of whom they tell. You do not like to have others speak of your faults: why should you speak of the faults of others? Sometimes it is a good thing to tell of the wrong things which others have done, that they may be corrected; but to tell tales about them, just to give them trouble or make others think poorly of them, is always bad.

But was it not silly in Joseph's big brothers to hate him just because he felt so smart, and because their father loved him so much and would believe what he told him about them? Would it not have been better if they had said, He is a boy: when he is older and knows more, he will not think he knows so much. He is our brother, and we ought to pity him or make light of his faults, and not lay up what he does against him. If they had done this, they would never have committed the cruel deed they did.

It is always bad to keep evil thoughts or feelings in our hearts; for there is no telling when they will lead us to do wrong things. If you hate any one, get that feeling out of your heart as quick as you can. If you keep it there, it will not only do you harm, but may lead you to do harm to others.

Joseph was proud of his gay coat of many colors. If we

have nothing but clothes to be proud of, ought we not to have more shame than pride? If we have a good and cheerful spirit, can we not be as happy in plain clothes as in gay? We are the best dressed when we are so dressed that neither we nor anybody else thinks about what we have on.

Though Joseph was made a slave in Egypt, he did not mope or despair, but went to work and did the best he could for his master, and so he rose to a high place of trust and power. When things do not go well with us, instead of crying or complaining, it is better to set about doing something with all our heart; for in this way we forget the trouble and make life better for ourselves and others.

“Let us, then, be up and doing,
With a heart for any fate;
Still achieving, still pursuing,
Learn to labor and to wait.”

XII. The Slave who became Governor.

(GENESIS XLI., XLII.)

Explanation.

This story tells us there was a great famine in Egypt. Such famines were not common in that land. Sometimes the Nile would not overflow its banks in the rain-season, and then the dry and parched land failed to produce its customary crop. This may have been the case seven years in succession, but is not at all probable. It is more likely that we have here a case of the fondness of the Hebrews for the sacred number seven.

In this story we have a good illustration of the ancient belief in dreams as means of foretelling future events. It was thought that God was the direct inspirer of dreams, and so it was of the greatest importance that they be rightly interpreted. None could do this without the help of God. In the story you will notice that Joseph modestly tells the king that it is not in him to interpret his dream, but God will give Pharaoh an answer of peace.

The interpreting of dreams was a recognized science, but sometimes the professional interpreters failed, and then the genius, the man with special insight given him of God, is sought out. Joseph has proven his power in the cases of the butler and the baker, and so rises to the greater matter of the king. Here his answers are so satisfactory that Pharaoh is convinced that he has the spirit of God and makes him ruler over all his realm, second in authority to himself. This faith in dreams we find in all the history of the Israelites, reaching on into the New Testament, though there were writers here and there who protested against it. One of these said:

"Vain and deceitful hopes befit the senseless man
And dreams make fools rejoice;
Like one who grasps at a shadow and chases the wind
Is he who puts trust in dreams."

Ephraim and Manasseh are tribal names, and the writer would have it appear that their ancestor, Joseph, was the favorite of God, as shown both by his own dreams and by his power to interpret those of other men. Benjamin is spoken of as a lad and also as the father of ten children. This shows us that we are dealing with legends, and not history. From the historical point of view the idea of bringing wheat enough on the backs of a few asses from Egypt to Palestine for a large family or tribe is too simple to be considered.

The testing of the brothers by Joseph seems cruel and unnecessary, but is quite in accord with the habit of Oriental despots. They were ever ready to do evil before doing good, that the good might seem the more wonderful. In this regard the dramatic effect of the story is good.

Its purpose is to show that Joseph as God's favorite was able to do great things for his race. We do not think God has any favorites, but through faith in Him and standing true to what we believe to be right and true the humblest of us can do much good in the world. Faith in God, prudence and foresight, the power of the humblest to rise by honesty and obedience to the voice of duty under all circumstances, are some of the lessons that this story may serve to illustrate.

Questions.

What was Pharaoh's dream which Joseph told the meaning of?

What good fortune came to Joseph because of his answer to this dream?

Why did Joseph's brothers go down into Egypt?

How did he receive them?

What is a famine?

What did Joseph do during the seven good years? what during the famine?

What did the brothers find in their sacks when they reached home?

Application.

What is it to have faith in God? In pit or prison, Joseph did not despair, but believed that God was with him and all would be well, and this belief helped him to do well. Will not such faith help us in all the hard places of life? You are in a pit or prison of temper or trouble because you cannot do what you want to do, or because you have not learned your lesson and think it too hard for you? Will it do any good to cry or fret or worry about it? Is it not better to do what we have to do in good spirit, saying, I will do the best I can, and trust that all will come out right? Every one can do well when the way is all easy and pleasant: the real test of a boy or girl is to do well when the way is hard and disagreeable.

If Joseph had not helped the butler and been kind to him in prison, he might never have had an opportunity to serve the king. What did Jesus mean when he said, "Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me?" (Matthew xxv. 40.) If we wait to do some great good to some great person, that time may never come, but, if we do little acts of kindness day by day to those about us, we may some time be able to do things for which many people will be glad.

"Not mighty deeds make up the sum
Of happiness below,
But little acts of kindness
Which any child may show."

If we never do great things, it is a real joy and peace to do

little things which make others happier. Such acts make the greater part of every good person's life.

When the king saw how wise, honest, and manly Joseph was, he thought at once: This is the man I want for a helper. I can trust him to rule over all my house. And always the wise and good are desired for the high places of life. To think the truth, to speak the truth, to act the truth,—this is the way to the largest and best service that we can ever give the world.

“Think truly, and thy thoughts
 Shall the world's famine feed;
 Speak truly, and each word of thine
 Shall be a fruitful seed;
 Live truly, and thy life shall be
 A great and noble creed.”

XIII. A Family Reunion.

(GENESIS XLIII.—XLV.)

Explanation.

This is one of the most thrilling tales in the Bible, and must have been a favorite at the festivals when the people gathered about their sacred altars or pillars and recited the traditions about the brave days of old.

The improbable things in it are easily overlooked or forgiven because of the interest it excites and the unexpected happy ending. It is hardly worth while to raise the question of its historical character, since it takes us into the realm of dreams and divining cups, where there is more reliance upon magic than upon facts.

In later times there was much protest on the part of some of Israel's leaders against sorcery or magic in all its forms, but here Joseph, the favorite of God, has his divining cup wherein he reads the divine secrets. Gold and silver pieces with figures on them were cast into a cup of water, and, by observing the reflection which they cast, those skilled in the art made out the future. There are mystical-minded people who still think

that they can read the future by tracing out the figures made by the grounds in a cup of tea.

The greater part of the story is taken up with the testing of the brothers. In this Joseph does not seem altogether noble. He seems to delight in torturing his brothers, and to be quite careless of the pain and suffering he is causing his aged father, whose favorite son he was. But the ancient compiler of the story saw nothing amiss in this, but loved his hero all the more because he could be severe with his brothers now that he has them in his hand. They must be soundly punished for their former wrong-doing. One of the best passages of the story is that where the brothers accuse themselves, saying one to another, "We are verily guilty concerning our brother, in that we saw the distress of his soul, when he besought us, and we would not hear: therefore is this distress come upon us."

Observe the noble offer of Judah, who for the sake of his aged father and because of his love for Benjamin, the babe of the family, is willing to become himself a slave, that he may save them. "Greater love," said Jesus, "hath no man than this, that he is ready to lay down his life for his friends."

The testing over, Joseph shows the love that is in his heart; and the sorely afflicted brothers with the father are made happy in their new home, Joseph declaring that it was to save their lives that God permitted him to be taken as a slave into Egypt. The interview of the old patriarch and the king is marked with great dignity.

Returning good for evil is the chief lesson to be drawn from the story. The power and grace of family ties may be dwelt upon, also the testing of character by the trials of life.

Questions.

Why did the brothers return again to Egypt?

What did they take with them?

How were they received by the governor?

What was found in Benjamin's sack?

What did Judah offer to do?

What land did Pharaoh give to Jacob and his sons?

Application.

Are we ever tested to see what kind of boys or girls we are? Yes, every day of our lives. Where? In the home, in the school, on the playground, everywhere. How? Every lesson is a test. It tries our minds to see how much they can do in the way of thought. Every game is a test of our skill, or strength or quickness. Every time we have to ask ourselves, Is this thing which I want to do or that I am asked to do right, ought I to do it? we are tested. Our answer shows the kind of boy or girl we are. Every time our brother or sister or play-fellow does something we do not like, our temper is tested to see how sweet, gentle, loving, and forgiving we can be. All through life our character is tested.

Did you ever do a wrong thing to any one? Did any one ever do a wrong thing to you? Did you ever forgive a wrong done to you? What does it mean to forgive? Suppose Joseph had been angry when he had his brothers in his power, remembering their former cruelty to him, and had made them slaves all the rest of their days, would that have made him happier than he was when he saw his father and all his family happily settled in Goshen? Does revenge ever make one better or happier?

Suppose a boy or girl tells some bad thing about you that is not true, would it do you any good to tell an untruth about him or her? Would not this mean two wrongs instead of one? Suppose instead of this you were to speak of the good qualities of one who had thus wronged you, say you hope if he said the bad thing he did not really mean it, that you like to think of him as too good and honest to say such a thing, would not this be better for you? And, if he learned of your kindly spirit towards him, would not he be sorry for what he said falsely about you?

If a boy treads down your snow man or tramples on the flowers in your garden, would it help matters any for you to do the same thing to him? If you were to show him some act of kindness, would not that be returning good for evil? How many ways can you think of in which we can return

good for evil or can overcome evil with good? Should we not make as little as possible of the faults or bad deeds of others?

“Be not swift to take offence;
 Let it pass.
 Anger is a foe to sense;
 Let it pass.
 Brood not darkly o’er a wrong,
 Which will disappear ere long;
 Rather sing this cheery song,
 ‘Let it pass; let it pass.’”

What does it mean to “be kindly affectioned one to another in brotherly love”? How can we show this love in the home? How should we treat our brothers and sisters? our father and mother? the old and the feeble?

“Speak gently to the aged one;
 Grieve not the care-worn heart;
 The sands of life are nearly run:
 Let such in peace depart.”

XIV. The Child in the Bulrushes.

(EXODUS II.)

Explanation.

To the modern Hebrews, as to those who lived centuries ago, Moses stands as the central figure of their religion and their history. They think of him as the founder of their national worship and the giver of their sacred laws. About all that loving and adoring hearts can ascribe to a great leader and teacher has been ascribed to him. While he has not been worshiped as a god, he has been thought of as having such relation to God that it has seemed to his followers very like blasphemy to question the truth of any of the sayings ascribed to him in the Bible.

In the legends concerning the great heroes of antiquity we expect exaggeration, and are rarely disappointed. We are not surely in the case of Moses. We have nothing but traditions about him, for in his day there was no thought of keeping

a record of things said and done. In these stories there is doubtless a kernel of fact, but it is now impossible to separate it from the bulk of legendary matter in which it is embodied. This is not at all necessary, for it all comes to us as parable, and it is only as such that we can use it.

This is true of nearly all that we call history. In the modern world we feel confident that some things are put down as they happened, that we can rely upon the dates recorded; but in nearly all that we think of as history we have only some man's story about what happened, and it may be true to the facts and it may not.

In either case its chief value is not in its accuracy, but in its inspiration, its power to quicken the mind of the reader and give meaning and zest to life. When we thus use a story as a parable, we make the best possible use of it. It is in this way that we should use the Moses stories. They are helpful not because of any historical truth in them, but because of the moral or spiritual truth we may derive from them.

In the Israelite legends we see "how wretched are they that hang on princes' favors." So long as Joseph was governor his people had the best land and flourished abundantly, but he passes, and the king also who clothed him with power, and their fortune is changed into misery. When the new ruler saw how many and how mighty they were getting to be, and might be a menace to the government, he reduces their strength and numbers by overwork and by destroying a part of the children. This was quite in accord with ancient custom.

This special story of the babe saved by the princess is like the nativity legends of the founders of great religions which bear witness to the belief of the people that "such men are not born of the chatter of the street."

Josephus tells us that God appeared to Amram in a dream, and, after reminding him of what He had done for Abraham and Jacob, told him that he was to be the father of a child who would make him famous and deliver the Hebrews from their distress under the Egyptians.

He also tells us that the infant Moses would not take food from an Egyptian woman, and, when he was three years old,

the princess presented him to the king, saying that, if she had no child, she would like him to rule after the death of her father, and the king playfully put a crown on his head. But Moses immediately pulled it off and trod upon it with his feet, whereupon the sacred scribe made a violent attempt to kill him, saying, "This, O king! is the child of whom God foretold, that if we kill him we shall be in no danger, but if he live he will trample thy kingdom under his feet."

But the princess snatched him away, had him educated with great care; and the Hebrews had good hopes that great things would be done by him. This shows how stories of this kind increase in wonders with years.

The central idea is that God cares for His own, and makes even the enemies of His people help in the work of their deliverance. The strength of mother-love, the sacrifices it inspires, may be dwelt upon. The motherly instinct in the heart of the childless princess saves the child cast upon the water.

Questions.

Were the Hebrews happy in Egypt while Joseph was governor?

What happened to them after his death?

What did the king say should be done with the Hebrew boy-babies?

What did Moses' mother do with him when he was three months old?

What did the Egyptian princess do for him?

What thoughts about his people and their need of a helper do you think his mother put into his mind as he grew up?

Application.

Why did Moses' mother hide him? To save him. Yes, but why did she want to save him? Because she loved him. What is the best thing you have in this world? Can you think of anything better than your father's or your mother's love for you? It makes them think of you and work for you and live for you every day of your life.

"What earthly love can take the place
Of the love of a fond mother,
Self-sacrificing, pure, and sweet,
Exceeding far all other.

"E'en now I think that I can hear
 That gentle voice, so calm,
 The loving words, God bless you, dear,
 And shield you from all harm."

How many good things can you think of that your parents are constantly doing for you? Who gives you a home and the good things in it, clothes, food, schools, a church and Sunday School, parks, playgrounds? And what do you do for those who do so much for you? How many ways can you think of in which you can help your father or mother? Don't you think it does them good to see you good, to see you sweet-tempered, kind, gentle, loving, and true, doing the best things in the best way you know?

The princess cared for Moses, though he was not her own child. There are children who have lost their father and mother. Kind-hearted people, like the princess, have found homes for them. Perhaps you are helping in this good work. If you give to the institutions that care for poor, homeless children, you are doing something to make their lives better and happier. When you speak kind words and do kind deeds to those who have not all the good things which you have, you are doing good, like the princess. It is in such simple, human ways that God helps those who cannot help themselves.

"God make my life a little light
 Within the world to glow;
 A little flame that burneth bright
 Wherever I may go.

"God make my life a little song
 That comforteth the sad;
 That helpeth others to be strong,
 And makes the singer glad.

"God make my life a little staff
 Whereon the weak may rest,
 That so what health and strength I have
 May serve my neighbors best."

XV. The Wonderful Bush.

(GENESIS III.-V.)

Explanation.

The main purpose of the story is to show how God called Moses to deliver Israel from Egypt. The descendants of Jacob had a hard lot under the Pharaohs that "knew not Joseph." Moses in his far-away home could not keep the picture of their sad state out of his mind. As the years went on, he felt that it was not right for him to be at ease and in comfort while they were experiencing such hardship. The thought came to him: Cannot I do something for them? The only thing to be done is to get them out of that land of bondage. I am slow of speech, but my brother Aaron has a free tongue, and perhaps he and I together can persuade them to steal away from their cruel oppressors and find a new home.

The more he thought about it, the more clear it became to him that this was a thing that could be done. And what could be done should be done. The voice of possibility became the voice of duty; and the voice of duty was to him the voice of God. The voice of God he must obey. The story of God speaking out of the burning bush is but a poetic setting forth of the conviction of Moses that it was his duty to set his people free.

The same voice came to him that came to the founder of Buddhism when he saw the misery of the people and felt that if he, a prince, should leave his palace of luxuries and go out in search of a remedy for human ills, such remedy could be found, and resolved to give all his mind and heart to this endeavor. And when a man's soul is all on fire of some great truth or purpose, then every wayside shrub is a burning bush whose tongue of flame urges him on to do what he sees should be done. Doubtless the old-time writers who thought of God as a big man imagined that He spake to men as one man speaks to another, but with the modern thought of God we must believe that He spake in ancient time as He speaks to-day.

Dwell upon this thought, and show how God speaks to us through both the sense of beauty and the sense of duty. There is possibly a hint of ancient tree-worship in the voice in the bush. To find God in the tree, as well as "sermons in stones and good in everything," is now, and ever was, a good habit of mind.

Speak of the nobleness of Moses in not forgetting his people in bondage. Always there have to be morally and spiritually inspired leaders, men of insight and conviction, who see what should be done and feel themselves called to do it, in order to secure liberty and larger life for the people. The phrase "making brick without straw," applied to anything extremely hard or seemingly impossible to do, comes from this story. The Egyptian bricks were made of mud mixed with straw or stubble to keep them from cracking as they baked in the sun.

The presence of God in nature and in life, His voice in the conviction of duty, the value of leadership, and sympathy for the oppressed, are some of the lessons which this story may be used to enforce.

Questions.

What did Pharaoh make the Hebrews do?

Why did Moses leave Egypt?

Where did he go?

What did he do in Midian?

What did he see and what did he hear one day as he was watching his sheep on the hillside?

What did the voice in the bush bid him do?

What did he ask of the king on his return to Egypt, and what was the king's answer?

Application.

In the blossoming shrubs and trees of the spring-time do we not see the beauty of God? and his glory in a gorgeous sunrise or sunset? In the commonest flowers of the field is there not a beauty and mystery that should make us feel that we are living in a divine world?

"Each little flower that opens,
 Each little bird that sings,
 God made their glowing colors,
 He made their tiny wings;

"The purple-headed mountain,
 The river running by,
 The sunset, and the morning red
 That brightens up the sky.

"Yes, all things bright and beautiful,
 All creatures great and small,
 And all things wise and wonderful,
 The Lord God made them all."

Can you think of any people overworked and oppressed to-day? How is it with children in factories and in mines? See Mrs. Browning's poem, "The Cry of the Children." How is it with fathers and mothers who have many to care for, feed, and clothe, and hardly know what it is to rest from early morn till late at night, and with the rest of the sleeping hours often broken with the cry of children? Can you think of any way in which you as children can help to free those who are thus burdened?

In your own home are there not many things which you can do for your mother to make her work and her cares lighter? You can at least try not to be fretful, peevish, fault-finding, quarrelsome, and show appreciation for what is done for you; and this will be a great help. A smile, a kiss, a glad "thank you, mother dear," may lighten the toil of the hardest day and sweeten all its cares.

Do you think it would be a surprise to your mother if you were to say to her, Mother, isn't there something I can do to help you now?

You can learn about the condition of children in mines and factory towns, and talk about it in your Sunshine Club or your Lend-a-Hand Club, and so help to create a feeling that will one day be strong enough to set them free, that they may

have the privilege of schools and playgrounds, which means so much to you.

There are those of your own age burdened with a feeling of shyness, of bad temper, and sometimes others, seeing their weakness, take advantage of it and tease and annoy them, thus making their burden heavier instead of lighter. This is always wrong. By your kind and encouraging words and looks you can do more perhaps to help them in this than their parents or teachers.

And what you see is right to do and feel that you ought to do, that you are to do; for it is God's way of speaking to you. And we are to remember that every place is holy where a holy deed is done.

XVI. People Set Free.

(EXODUS VII.-XV.)

Explanation.

The story of the plagues and the crossing of the Red Sea plunges us deep into the realm of miracle and magic, and in that realm it is idle to look for order and consistency. The compiler of the three versions was not so anxious to make all the parts agree one with another as he was to preserve all the material which came into his hands. We do not expect the man with a magical rod in his hand to do things according to the order of nature. If he does, we are disappointed. It is only when he does things wherein we cannot see the connection between cause and effect that we are interested in him.

If we try to think of the Bible account of the escape of the Israelites from Egypt as describing real events, we are in a perfect nest of difficulties which no ingenuity can overcome. And in such endeavor we are in danger of getting tangled up in the difficulties, and so miss the true import of the story. Dismiss that thought, and read it to see what the ancient idea was of the greatness of Israel's national leader and the glory of the God he worshiped. We have to say that, judged by the standard of to-day, the story does not give us a very high ideal. God is pictured as instructing Moses in magic, and

telling him to deceive the Egyptians, and as hardening Pharaoh's heart so that he would not let the Hebrews go till he had afflicted the land with plagues, causing infinite suffering to both men and animals, and all to show His own power.

Such a thought of God seems to us low and crude; and we cannot read the story without feeling grateful that we live in an age of natural law and order rather than in an age of belief in miracle and magic. But we are to keep in mind the main purpose of the story, which is to show that the Hebrew leader had a great and difficult task in getting his people out of Egypt, and was able to do it only through the help of God. The plagues described are such as have appeared in Egypt at different times, and give local color to the story.

We can well believe that the Egyptian ruler would not readily consent to let the clans on the border of his realm that he could press into his service go from him. We can also easily understand how a pestilence of any kind in that superstitious age could be interpreted as a punishment sent of God. It would be natural for the Hebrews to make use of any such event in their endeavor to get away.

If the Israelites lived in Egypt, how did they get across the Red Sea into Canaan? This is a question that was doubtless often asked. The highly dramatic story in Exodus xiv. grew out of the endeavors to answer it (Joshua iii.).

The passover observance seems out of place here, but was probably inserted to give it the flavor of antiquity and the authority of Moses.

The thing to keep uppermost is the persistence of Moses in the face of the greatest obstacles until his people are set free. Courage in the presence of difficulties, the inspiring power of a true leader, the love of liberty and the natural joy which freedom brings, the sin of obstinacy in the wrong, and gratitude that we live in an age of faith in natural law and order as the normal way of God's working, are lessons suggested by this story.

Questions.

What did Moses do with his magic rod before Pharaoh?

Could the Egyptian magicians do the same things?

What effect did this have on Pharaoh?

How did the Israelites get across the Red Sea?

What happened to Pharaoh and his host of warriors in the midst of the sea?

What was the feeling of the Israelites when they found they were really free?

Application.

We have plagues or pests that come upon us now, such as locusts, or grasshoppers, canker-worms, caterpillars, gypsy or brown-tail moths, etc. Do we ever think of them as sent by God to punish us for our sins, for our impiety or our wrongdoing? Do we ever think of them as coming because some magician has waved his wand over the land? How do we try to get rid of them? By prayer and religious sacrifices or by purely natural means? Is it not better to live in a world of order than of chance and magic?

Law does not belittle nor displace the thought of God, for it is only our name for the way God works. Is it not just as religious to believe that He does things in an orderly way that can be depended upon as to believe that He works in a disorderly way, and in such freakish fashion that you never can tell what He will do next? He does not merely help us now and then, but He is with us and helping us all the time when we walk in His way. If we do not keep His laws, but live in such a manner as to bring disease and sickness upon us, we are not to blame Him or think that He is angry with us, but we are to blame ourselves and correct our way of life. Some people seem to think it a virtue to be sick, but illness means that we have not kept God's law of health and life, and instead of taking credit to ourselves for this we ought to be ashamed of it. The most religious thing we can do in this regard is to find out the way of health, and keep it with all our mind and strength.

"A little work and a little play
 And lots of quiet sleep;
 A cheerful heart and a sunny face,
 And lessons learned and things in place,—
 Ah, that's the way the children grow,
 Don't you know?"

There are plagues of various kinds which we bring upon ourselves by our own wills and tempers. Can you name some of them? We can hardly think that the Lord "hardened Pharaoh's heart, that He might multiply His wonders before him," and that He afflicted all the Egyptians and their animals because of the obstinacy of this hard-hearted man. But we know that, if we indulge our self-will and allow ourselves to be stubborn, the habit grows upon us, and it gets to be about the hardest thing in the world for us to do the things we ought to do.

Then it often happens that great numbers of people suffer because of the obstinacy or wrong-headedness of one man. It is thought by some that the obstinacy of George III. brought on the war of the Revolution,—that, if he had yielded to reason and justice, it would never have been. For the sake of others as well as ourselves we should cultivate the habit of following right reason and good will.

"Children, who read my lay,
 Thus much I have to say:
 Each day, and every day,
 Do what is right!
 Right things in great and small;
 Then, though the sky should fall,
 Sun, moon, and stars, and all,
 You shall have light.

"Life's journey, through and through,
 Speaking what is just and true;
 Doing what is right to do
 Unto one and all,
 When you work and when you play
 Each day, and every day;
 Then peace shall gild your way,
 Though the sky should fall."

XVII. Troubles in the Wilderness.

(Exodus XV., XVII., XXXII.)

Explanation.

The troubles of the Israelites were not over when they escaped from Egypt any more than were those of the negroes when they were set free. They had often to say to themselves: The life in Egypt, hard as it was, was not so bad as this. There we had enough to eat and drink, but here we die of hunger and thirst. It was easier to make brick in the hot sun than to be tramping in a wilderness, not knowing where we are going or what will become of us. How many there were of them, and how long it took them to reach Canaan, and by what route they traveled, we cannot say.

The Bible accounts of their wanderings were not written out in their present form till several hundred years after the exodus, so that the question of historical accuracy is not to be considered. One account says there were 600,000 men, which would mean some three or four millions of people. To think of such a company wandering about in a wilderness forty years, under the leadership of a single man, is to dismiss the idea once for all.

In the legends we see that the Israelites behaved very much as we would expect people long held in bondage to do. They did not know how to think and act for themselves, and were ready to cry and complain at the first sign of trouble. When things went well with them, they were ready to promise Moses and the Lord anything they asked; but, so soon as trials came, they forgot their promises, and began to chide their leader, and ask him why he had brought them away from the flesh-pots of Egypt to perish in a wilderness. On the whole, Moses was patient with them, only dealing differently in a marked degree when they betrayed a lack of faith in their God and a disposition to worship other deities.

Dwell upon the troubles in the wilderness, for, whether the time was long or short, the company small or great, they must have been grievous, and the patience and wisdom of the leader

often put to the proof. The supply of food and water must have been a constant source of anxiety, and the miracle stories of the manna and the quails, and of the bitter waters made sweet and the spring gushing out of the rock upon the tap of the magic rod, probably grew out of this difficulty. The incident of the Golden Calf shows how strong was the tendency to idolatry among the Hebrews. The power of patient continuance in the pursuit of a great purpose, self-reliance, making the best of things, are lessons which this story may enforce.

Questions.

What troubles came to the Israelites in the wilderness?

What did Moses do to the water at Marah?

How did he get water from a rock?

Who held up his arms with the rod of God during the battle with the Amalekites?

How did he feed the people?

Where did he go to get the stone tablets for his laws?

What did he find the people doing on his return from the mountain, and what was his feeling?

Application.

We all have sharp trials, things hard to bear; and we sometimes speak of these as bitter experiences. What do you think will sweeten them? Can you think of anything better than a kind word or a loving deed?

Do we gain anything by whining and fault-finding when we come to the hard places in life? We never like to hear anybody else cry or complain when things do not go well with them; but does it ever occur to us that our cryings and complainings may seem as silly and childish to others as theirs do to us? We admire the boy or girl who tries to make the best of whatever happens and does what is hardest with a brave and cheerful spirit. Is not that the kind of boy or girl we should try to be?

“Suppose the world doesn’t please you,

Nor the way some people do,

Do you think the whole creation

Will be altered just for you?

“And isn’t it, my boy or girl,
 The wisest, bravest plan,
 Whatever comes or doesn’t come
 To do the best you can?”

Moses was not working for himself, but for his people. It was as much their duty as it was his to look out for food and water, yet they put all the blame on him when they had nothing to eat or drink. Do we blame others for our own troubles? Can you think of any habit worse than this? Why do we ever do it? Is it not because we are weak? It is like saying: I am weak. I cannot do things for myself. I let others do things for me, and, when they do what I do not like or do not do what I like, then I cry or scold or complain of what they have done and expect everybody else to pity me. Moses said of the Israelites who did this that they seemed like so many puling babies. If we do this, wherein are we better than they?

“’Tis easy enough to be pleasant
 When life flows like a song;
 But the man worth while is the one that will smile
 When everything goes dead wrong.
 For the test of the heart is trouble,
 And it always comes with the years,
 And the smile that is worth the praise of the earth
 Is the smile that comes through tears.”

We get food in a purely natural way. Does it not come from God as truly as the manna and quail of the Hebrew story?

“Day by day the manna fell:
 Oh, to learn this lesson well!
 Still by constant mercy fed,
 Give me, Lord, my daily bread.

“Day by day, the promise reads,
 ‘Daily strength for daily needs:
 Cast foreboding fears away;
 Take the manna of to-day.’”

XVIII. The Ten Words.

(EXODUS XIX., XX., XXV.-XXVII.)

Explanation.

Laws grow out of the experience of people in their endeavor to live together. They come into being as occasion requires, and are observed with more or less strictness so long as they serve human needs. We make new laws every year to meet new demands. There are certain general laws or principles which are very old and belong to all nations, and there could be no civilization if they were not respected. In common with all other people the Hebrews came to have a code of rules or laws for the guidance of their life. As time went on, an early collection of these laws became very sacred in their eyes.

They came to think of it as the strength and stability of their national life and the heart of their religion. If you read Psalm cxix., which is the longest in the Psalter and every verse of which has a word which means the law, or the last part of Psalm xix., beginning, "The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul," you will see how great was their regard for it and what an important part it played in their religion. When the question of its origin came up, they had had it so long that no one could tell how old it was or whence it came. All they knew was that it was very old; and, as Moses was regarded as the founder of the nation, what was more natural than to think that it came from him? or, rather, from God through him?

With their thought of God it was easy for them to believe that He could come down from heaven to a mountain-top, meet Moses there, and write them with His own finger on a table of stone. What we call the Ten Commandments are the heart of the code, and the story of Sinai bears witness to the veneration of the Hebrews for both Moses and the Law. The Commandments in their brief form should be as familiar as the letters of the alphabet. See that each member of the class can say them in order and also by number.

We can hardly imagine a people on a march through a

wilderness, or living a nomadic life, carrying about spinning-wheels, looms, dye-pots, and smelting furnaces for the manufacture of the things named in the story for the Tent of Meeting, and such a tent with all its furniture and finery would be a needless burden under such conditions. There was very likely a tent where Moses heard the complaints of the people and adjusted their differences, and where he may also have offered sacrifices for all his followers. It was probably very like other tents in the camp, with such additions as were necessary to its use.

This was the reality: reverent imagination did the rest. It is thought the elaborate description in Exodus xxv.-xxvii. is from a writer who had before him as a model the temple of Zerubbabel, built after the return of the exiles in 536 B.C. He would have the people know that this house of God was builded after a divine pattern, revealed to the great founder of the nation. The value of the story to us is the picture it gives of the willingness of the people to do their best for what we may call the Church of God in the wilderness.

The conquest of Canaan was a long and hard struggle, and this is one of many stories that grew out of it. There are always giants to frighten the timid when any new thing is to be done.

The value of law and order, the beauty of God's house and the need of willing workers, of every person doing his best and giving his best for what is highest and holiest in life, and the need of courage for new enterprises, are lessons that may be presented in connection with this story.

Questions.

- Can you repeat the Ten Commandments?
- How was the Tent of Meeting made?
- What did the men bring for it? what the women?
- What did the spies find that was good in the Promised Land?
- What did they say about the people that dwelt there?
- What did they all do?

Application.

If a man were to try to build a house by nailing boards and timbers together without any plan or rule, do you think he

would succeed? If he did, what kind of a house would it be? What do you think your life would be if it was without order, your thoughts all jumbled up together and your acts having nothing to do one with another? What would it be if there was no order in the home, no rule or custom about study, work, and play? What would our life together be if there were no laws to guide us and protect us?

If we keep the Commandments, we shall (1) worship but one God; (2) have no image or idol to worship in place of Him; (3) never speak His name except with love and respect; (4) keep one day in seven as a day of rest and thoughtful praise to God for His blessings; (5) respect and obey our parents; (6) never wantonly take the life of any living thing; (7) be pure in thought, word, and deed; (8) never take what belongs to another; (9) never tell a falsehood; (10) never desire what others have which we know we have no right to.

The first two commandments do not seem to apply to us, since we believe there is but one God and never think of making an idol to worship in His stead. Still, if we think more about clothes or money than we do about what is true, beautiful, and good, what are we but worshipers of idols? Do you know what Jesus meant when he said, "Ye cannot serve God and mammon"? (Matthew vi. 24.)

"Give ear, ye children, to my law,
Devout attention lend,
Let the instructions of my mouth
Deep in your hearts descend.

"Let children learn the mighty deeds
Which God performed of old,
Which in our younger years we saw,
And which our fathers told."

Did you ever see anything in the evening, that looked a great deal larger than it was? Do not lessons seem a great deal harder than they really are, when we do not want to study and when we are afraid that we shall fail in them? Can you give an example of the way fear magnifies difficulties? Do not

the giants that we fear become quite small when we have courage and go bravely out to meet them?

“The coward in the conflict
Gives up at first defeat;
If once repulsed, his courage
Lies shattered at his feet.
The brave heart wins the battle,
Because, through thick and thin,
He'll not give up as conquered:
He fights, and fights to win.”

XIX. The Fall of a City.

(JOSHUA I.-II.)

Explanation.

It has been said by an eminent Bible scholar that if you want to get a perfectly false idea of the Hebrew conquest of Canaan, read the book of Joshua. When we remember that it was written some six centuries or more after the events described are supposed to have occurred, we dismiss the thought of history from our minds altogether. The writer took his material from popular tradition, and presents his hero in all the war-glory with which the popular imagination had clothed him. He ascribes to one man what was the work of a nation, and makes him do in a few years what it took the nation as many centuries to accomplish.

Joshua is a merciless warrior, and his god is a merciless war-god, and both show us how far the Hebrews had to travel in spiritual thought before they could revere as an ideal him who taught them to love their enemies, and could worship the God who made of one blood all tribes and nations to dwell as one family on the face of the earth. Joshua was tactful, resourceful, brave, and abounding in energy; and these are not only good things to have when there is fighting to be done, but when there is any hard and serious work to be done. These are things to be dwelt upon in connection with this lesson.

The story-teller wishes to make it appear above all things

else that what Joshua did he did by the help and authority of God, so that all the glory would be God's glory. And what must be the power and greatness of Israel as the favorite or "chosen people" of such a great and mighty God! This is the thought underlying all these hero-legends. And what can be more heartening and inspiring than the conviction that the mighty God is with you and for you?

We cannot think what the history of the Hebrew race would have been apart from this belief. It is a conquering faith. It is the faith of all earnest workers. Since God is our name for all that is good, beautiful, and true, when we are working for what is right and good, we, too, believe that God is with us and for us. This is the faith that overcometh the world. You cannot emphasize this idea too much.

What Napoleon said about the word "impossible" not being a French word or being "found only in the dictionary of fools," and "there shall be no Alps," may be recalled in this connection. Angels of cheer always come to the brave. The stars in their courses fight for them; the sun and moon stand still for them.

The deceivers are made slaves, "hewers of wood and drawers of water." We cannot praise the traitress Rahab, who, to secure the safety of herself and family, betrayed her country.

Courage born of faith in God, the power of a brave, energetic soul to surmount obstacles, the bondage of deceit, are lesson suggestions for this story.

Questions.

Who led the Israelites into the Promised Land?

How did they cross the Jordan River?

How was the city of Jericho taken?

Who met Joshua and told him how to capture it?

What was done to its people?

What happened to those who tricked Joshua into signing a treaty of peace?

Application.

Walls of difficulty fall down before the brave soul. The timid spies sent out by Moses said there were giants in the Promised Land, and that the Hebrews would be no more than grasshoppers before them, but Joshua finds that they are ordinary men, and that he can beat them down. The timid boy or girl knows that he or she cannot speak a piece, learn the hard lesson, do the long errand, take part in the strenuous game, play the pianoforte or other musical instrument, do right when others are doing wrong, perform the hard duty; but the brave heart hears the voice that says, "Be strong and of a great courage," and goes straight at the hard task, and it is done.

Can you give an example of this? Can you think of any men and women that you have read about who have done great things through courage and energy?

"God's trumpet wakes the slumbering world:

Now each man to his post!

The red-cross banner is unfurled,—

Who joins the glorious host?

"He who in fealty to the truth,

And counting all the cost,

Doth consecrate his gen'rous youth,—

He joins the sacred host!

"He who, with calm, undaunted will,

Ne'er counts the battle lost,

But, though defeated, battles still,—

He joins the faithful host!"

Always there are unexpected helpers for those who are in earnest and doing what they think is right. What do you think this saying means,—"God helps those who help themselves"? How does God help us? Sun, moon, and stars, and the stones of the field are in league with us when we are living as we ought to live and doing what we ought to do.

Is it not a sure sign of a small mind to think that one can get permanent good by deceiving? And does not falsehood make

slaves and cowards of us? The student who deceives about his lessons, pretends that he knows them when he does not, loses the power of mastery and has to take a lower place in life than honest study and toil would give him. He thus makes himself "a hewer of wood and a drawer of water."

"Go forth to life, O child of earth,
Still mindful of thy heavenly birth;
Thou art not here for ease or sin,
But manhood's noble crown to win."

XX. A Brave Band.

(JUDGES VI., VII.)

Explanation.

We have in this story an illustration of the tendency to magnify and exaggerate which is characteristic of all old-time legends. A tribe of wandering Midianites with 135,000 warriors, and "camels like the sands of the seashore for number," would have to do what Nebuchadnezzar was fabled to have done,—eat grass like oxen in order to live in such a small district; and it is doubtful if there would be grass enough for such a host. And Gideon's little band of braves would have to make pretty good time to compass such a camp in a single night. Such representations make us see that this is not a history of the olden time, but a story of the olden time.

The Hebrews were clearly in a sorry case after they entered Canaan. They had not only to fight the regular settlers there, but also defend themselves against the marauding tribes, like the Midianites, who found it easier to steal crops than to raise them. They were harassed by them very much as the New England settlers were by the Indians.

Explain how the threshing was done in that time and how it is done now. Gideon did not think all the glory of his race should be in the past. If God was in the past, He ought to be in the present. If he cared for His people in the wilderness, He ought to care for them in the new land to which He had directed them.

And, thinking thus, Gideon began to dream and ask questions of himself. He was muscular and vigorous. Why should not he do something for Israel as well as Joshua and Moses? But the task was a great one: was he equal to it? It was doubtful, still he could try; and the man who dares to try is pretty sure to hear an angel saying to him, "The Lord is with thee, thou mighty man of valor." And the man who really believes that he has God with him is going to do something or die in the attempt.

The main interest of the story is in Gideon's band, and how he sifted the people to find the few and fit. The chief lesson is the power of the few, the few called and chosen by their fitness to do the work which the times demand.

Questions.

Who was Gideon?

Whom did he and his people fear?

What did the angel say to him?

How was he convinced that God would be with him if he fought the Midianites?

How did he reduce the size of his volunteer army?

How did his little band of 300 frighten the enemy and conquer them?

Application.

Does this story make you think of Davy Crockett's motto, "Be sure you are right, then go ahead"? Can we always be sure that we are right? Do we not have to venture a great deal, especially in any new thing we are called to do? But should we not take all the care possible to be sure we are right and that we are equal to the thing we attempt to do?

Do you recall what Jesus said about the man setting out to build a tower without first counting the cost and seeing if he have enough to finish it? or that other saying about one king making war on another king without first consulting whether he be able with ten thousand to meet him who cometh against him with twenty thousand? (Luke xiv. 28-32.)

Jesus sifted his followers by telling them of the hardships they would have to endure if they enlisted in his cause. (Matthew x. 32-39.) So did the Italian patriot, Mazzini.

Is it not better to do something worth doing ourselves than to be ever telling of the great deeds of the past? When we see things that need to be done, should not we try to do them? When we see some really hard thing that ought to be done, are we not apt to say, Oh, I don't know enough; I am not big enough; I have not time; I am not prepared; somebody else can do it so much better; perhaps some time I can do something, but not now?

"I Can't is a sad little boy,—

I've met him in many a place.

Does he go to your school, my dear children?

Do you know the look of his face?"

Gideon might have said something like that when the call came to drive away the marauding Midianites, but he didn't. He went to work, and did what he thought Moses or Joshua would have done under the same circumstances. And because of this we are thinking about him to-day. Always those who do not simply dream of doing great things, but go to work and do what they can, are the ones the world likes to remember. And their word to us is:

"Abide not in the realm of dreams,

O man, however fair it seems,

But with clear eye the present scan,

And hear the call of God and man.

"Think not in sleep to fold thy hands,

Forgetful of thy Lord's commands;

From duty's claims no life is free,—

Behold! to-day hath need of thee."

Have you heard about the three hundred at Thermopylæ, and about the army of Xerxes which was so large that he could do nothing with it? And about the six hundred at Balaklava? What does the expression "Gideon's band" mean? If two or three of you feel sure that you are right in any matter, and stand for it against all the rest of the school or the company on the playground, are you not a Gideon's band? Have you ever heard the expression, "One with God is a majority"?

If so, what do you think it means? Numbers do not count against the truth.

If all the people in our town or city were to vote a wrong thing right, their vote would not make it so. The one boy or girl who has the right answer to an example will win, even if all the wrong answers in the class should be just the same. If one boy in a crowd sees what is right, while all the others are shouting for what is wrong, they will have to come to his side in the end, for no amount of shouting can make a wrong right.

“Gird up thy loins and take thy road,
Obedient to the vision be;
Trust not in numbers; God is God,
And one with Him majority.”

XXI. A Strong Man.

(JUDGES XIII.-XVI.)

Explanation.

Not long after the Israelites came into Canaan, the Philistines, who had been settled for a long time in the western part of the country, made them their bondmen. They did not make them work, as the Egyptians did, but ruled them and plundered them at will. This slavery, we are told, lasted forty years (Judges xiii. 1, xiv. 4).

In the Hebrew legends Samson was honored as the man who began the work of freeing Israel from this bondage. His name means the Splendid Sun, and fragments of an ancient sun-myth are, it is thought, woven into the tales concerning him. His long hair typifies the long rays of the sun, shorn of which it is without power, while the yellow foxes, with fire-brands in their tails, are the lurid thunder-clouds, whose flashes set fire to the ripening grain.

The story of Osiris in Egypt, or of Adonis in Syria, or Hercules in Greece, or Balder among the Norsemen, may be told in connection with this story.

Explain that a sun-myth is a story in which the sun's action is described as if the sun were a god, or big, non-natural man.

Though Samson is pictured as praying to God and being given divine strength in answer to his prayer, he behaves more like a heathen deity than a Hebrew worshiper. We can commend neither his piety nor his honesty. There is, indeed, nothing to commend except his physical strength.

It is possible that in that wild time of the Judges, when "each man was a law unto himself, and did that which was right in his own eyes," there was some man who did certain great feats which made people talk about him. The stories gained in the telling until they became the impossible tales told of Samson.

But, whatever their origin, they are well told, and show us what kind of a man was most admired in that far-off time. He is not the kind of hero that refined and civilized people highly esteem. Yet it has to be said that this type still has its admirers. Witness the popular interest in football and prize-fighters, and how the victors in these contests are glorified.

In time of war the strong man is needed, and the Israelites, in all their history, were rarely without an occasion for using that kind of man. The Nazarite was a kind of ancient monk, who did not think it right to cut the hair or to drink wine or other strong drink. To do this would lessen his power. Among all people there are some who will not cut the hair because they think it is the source of strength. We are not persuaded of this, but all will agree, probably, that intemperance means weakness.

As the birth of Isaac was announced by an angel (Genesis xviii. 10), so was Samson's. This idea appears in the New Testament (Luke i. 26). It shows the belief of the people that their true helpers have God with them from the beginning. For the interpretation of the Samson story as a sun-myth see *The Bible for Learners* (Vol. I., chapter xx.).

The value of temperance and the true glory of physical health and strength may be set forth in connection with this story. Also the value of mental, moral, and spiritual power in contrast with that of Samson.

Questions.

Where did the Philistines live?

How long were the Israelites in bondage to them?

What did Samson do to the lion, and how did he destroy the Philistines' grain-fields and their olive orchards and vineyards?

What did the Philistines do to him?

What was his final act?

What was the vow, or pledge, of a Nazarite? (Judges xiii. 4; Numbers vi. 1; Amos ii. 11.)

Application.

Do you want to be strong? Isn't it great fun to live when we are perfectly well and full of vigor?

"Oh, the wild joys of living! the leaping from rock up to rock,
The strong rending of boughs from the fir-tree, the cool silver shock
Of the plunge in a pool's living water.
How good is man's life, the mere living!"

How good it is to be so well that we do not have to think about our health at all, but feel equal always to anything which we want to do! How can we keep this way? By obeying the laws of life, which means eating the things we ought to eat, having plenty of sleep, keeping the body clean and pure, studying hard and playing hard, doing with our might what we have to do. Dawdling over anything means physical weakness as well as mental.

Paul said, Bodily exercise profiteth little. Do you agree with him? With the old Greeks it meant a great deal, not only in the way of the joy of physical life, but of intellectual life as well. They could not have led the world as thinkers and in the fine arts if they had not, through bodily exercise, made themselves such perfect examples of the human form divine. The place games and sports should have in education and life may be dwelt upon.

But strength of body without strength of mind may wreck a life, as an engine without an intelligent engineer would wreck a train. Do you admire Samson? He was physically strong, he was cunning; but what more can you say of him that was good? He did not make a beast of himself by use of strong

drink, as men of his type are quite likely to do. This is certainly to his credit. But in intellect and morals he was so weak that others could master him, make him grind corn in prison, and could put out his eyes. He knew no higher law than the law of revenge: As they did to me, so have I done unto them. How does this agree with the Golden Rule? Which do you think the better way? He said, Out of strength comes sweetness, but he did not show this in his life. He left that for us to do.

He may have been the right kind of man to begin the work of freeing Israel from bondage to the Philistines, but he could not have led his people very far in the way of peace and prosperity. It required another kind of man for that, one who was strong in mind and good will. This is the kind of strength that brings lasting good.

"Strong in the living God,
Strong for His work and word,
Be ev'ry heart;
Strong for the true and right,
Strong for the Christian fight,
Strong with celestial might
To do our part."

XXII. The Gleaner.

(THE BOOK OF RUTH.)

Explanation.

The book of Ruth is what would be called to-day a short story or novel. In the Hebrew Bible it was placed near the end of the collection, with such imaginative works as The Song of Songs, Ecclesiastes, and Esther, and was never regarded with the same feeling of sacredness that attached to the Law and Prophets.

It is a beautiful harvest story, celebrating the simple and natural sentiments of unaffected human hearts. We have, first, the good mother-in-law, who has been so kind and considerate of her sons' wives taken from a heathen tribe that

they are eager to leave their own country, that they may be with her. So great is the devotion of one that she cannot be turned from this purpose. Naomi shows her love for them and her thoughtfulness in her desire to spare them the hard life she knows they would have in her home land. Ruth is equally thoughtful for Naomi. She is no sooner in the new home than she begins the hard task of providing for their needs.

In Boaz we have the prosperous peasant, kind, generous, honest, with friendly greetings for all who labor for him and ready help and sympathy for all in need. All three are good people to know and be associated with. The world is better because they are in it. It is a picture of simple country life that is good to have in the mind.

In reaping the wheat or barley, many sheaves of grain would fall from the reaper or cradle. These the laborers must not stop to pick up, but leave them for the poor to glean. See the Hebrew law in regard to this (Leviticus xix. 9, 10). Refer also to Millet's picture, *The Gleaners*.

Explain the custom of giving a shoe in the presence of witnesses in proof of a real estate deal or a marriage intention. Instead of this we now record the deeds or intentions. The city gate was the general place of meeting to hear the news and to transact all kinds of business. It was something more than the store or post-office or blacksmith shop in country villages.

Observe that in the mind of the writer there was no feeling of enmity for the Moabites, no sense of superiority because of religion or race. The sentiments presented are universal, and the religion is universal,—the religion of humanity, of love, and good will. It is natural and beautiful. It may be well to trace on a map the journey of Naomi from Bethlehem up over the Jordan River down on the east side of the Dead Sea to Moab.

Unselfish love, sympathy, courtesy, and natural piety are lesson suggestions for this story.

Questions.

Where did Naomi and her family go because of the famine in Judah?
 Of what race did the sons take wives, and what were their names?
 Why did Ruth follow Naomi back to her home land?
 What did she say to her about this?
 In whose field did Ruth glean?
 What was the manner of Boaz towards her?
 What was the name of their first child?

Application.

The Bible has much to say about famines, and they were very common in the olden time, when people were content to raise just enough grain for their own use, and did not carry anything over from one year to another. We cannot be too grateful that we live in an age and land where such things are practically unknown. Now that we have fruits, vegetables, and all kinds of grain the year round, we think little about the harvest season, but with people who till the soil it means much, and is a glad and merry time. The harvest festival is a good festival to celebrate.

In Hebrew times the gleaners had a hard time of it at the best, but kind-hearted landlords, like Boaz, made their lot somewhat easier and happier. Ruth was happy in her glean-
 ing. Why? Because she loved Naomi, and it is a joy to work for those we love. So long as we can feel that there is for us

"Another year of happy work
 That better is than play;
 Of simple cares, and love that grows
 More sweet from day to day,"

we have in us the secret of the happy life.

What is it that makes life sweet and good? We admire Naomi, Ruth, and Boaz. Why? Because they were good and kind, and did all they could to help each other. Love was at the heart of all they said and did. Love, Paul tells us, is the greatest thing in the world, and, if we have in our hearts the kind he praises in the thirteenth chapter of his first letter to the Corinthians, we need have no fear but what our lives will

be full of peace and joy. We may not be free from cares, troubles, trials, hard things to do, hard things to bear,—we must not expect that,—but in all these we shall know that it is worth while to live, that our blessings are more than we can number.

“Let us be tender and trusty and true,—
Here is a thought, dearest children, for you;
Where’er we go and whatever we do,
Let us be tender and trusty and true.

“Let us be trusty and tender and true,—
Children, I pray you to keep this in view;
Blessing each other, our blessing we find,
Therefore be helpful and thoughtful and kind.

“Let us be cheerful and happy as well,
That all our life-service doubly may tell;
God loves the cheerful heart singing its lay,
Let us then joyously keep on our way.

“Brave to the battle of life we will go,
Tender and trusty in all that we do;
Helpful and thoughtful to all we will prove,
Winning all hearts by our goodness and love.”

Do you think there is any better kind of religion than that expressed in acts of love and good will?

XXIII. A Voice in the Night.

(I SAMUEL I.-IV.)

Explanation.

It was the habit of the Hebrew writers to ascribe all Israel’s successes to piety, all misfortunes to impiety. If we interpret this in a large way, we may say that they were much nearer the truth than those who assign all changes of fortune to merely material causes. Once Shiloh was an important social and religious center, and the house of Eli was the principal priestly family in that part of the country. Later Jerusalem became the center of Hebrew life. The chief shrine or temple was

there, and the ark was taken into it. Zadok and his sons supplanted the house of Eli in priestly authority.

Why this change? Why was Shiloh deserted or destroyed? What caused the fall of the house of Eli? The story of Samuel attempts to answer these questions, and it answers them in the usual Hebrew way of finding the causes for all such changes in religion.

It tells us that Eli was a noble old priest, but weak in parental discipline. He spared the rod, and spoilt his sons. When they became men, they knew not the Lord, and used their position as priests simply as an opportunity to corrupt and plunder the people. They looked upon the sacrifices very much as Pope Leo X. is said to have regarded Christianity, simply as a "very profitable superstition."

And because they thought of religion in this way, and acted according to their belief, their power went from them, as the pope's went from him in a later day. A person not of their line or spirit must take up the priestly function. So our story tells us that Samuel, who, like Cæsar, was a priest before he was a ruler, was trained for this high office by Eli, the last of the good priests of that family.

The noteworthy points in the story are the dedication of Samuel to the priesthood from his birth and the mother's joy in him, the goodness of Eli and the badness of his sons, the vision of God by the child-priest foretelling the fall of the house of Eli, and the victory of the Philistines as scourges of the Lord for the discipline of his chosen people.

To consecrate means to separate, to set apart for sacred use or office. In the case of Samuel we see what the consecration of children meant in the olden time. Explain what we mean by it to-day,—not separation from the world, but from its evil in thought and action.

Make much of the statement that the child Samuel grew in favor with both God and men (1 Samuel ii. 26). That it was because he remembered "that duty, not pleasure must lead, and tried every day to be perfect indeed," that God trusted him with His message, and made him a true leader and helper to His people.

A true idea of dedication to God, of the trust and insight that comes through growth in goodness, and of the effect of wrong-doing both upon the wrong-doer and others, may be taught and illustrated by this story. See the picture by Sir Joshua Reynolds, *The Infant Samuel at Prayer*.

Questions.

- What was the name of Samuel's mother?
- What did she do with her child, and why did she do it?
- Were Eli's sons like their father?
- What was the voice that Samuel heard at night?
- What did it say to him?
- Did his vision come true?

Application.

Would you like to be dedicated to the Lord in the same way that Samuel was? Were those thus "lent to the Lord" always good men? How was it with Eli's sons? Does not the good life depend more upon the kind of thoughts we think than upon the place where we live or the office we fill?

Isn't that the best kind of consecration which means loving and following the true, the just, the beautiful, and the good so much that, while we are in the world with all kinds of people, its evil does not get into our thoughts or acts?

What do you think of the "service of consecration of children" in our churches? What does it mean to the parents? What good may it bring to the children?

"To find and serve Thee in the world,
By seeking truth and helping men,
To this we consecrate them now,
And day by day will o'er again.

"Thus do we keep them while we give,
And make them still of nobler worth.
When all the world is given thus,
Heaven will indeed have come on earth."

Do you think God spoke to Samuel as He speaks to us to-day? Do you not often have to choose between doing the thing you want to do and the thing you feel you ought to do? What is this whisper of conscience in your own breast?

"It was the voice of God that spake
In silence to thy silent heart,
And bade each worthier thought awake,
And every dream of earth depart."

Do you think Samuel would have seen the vision if he had not been obedient and faithful? Ever the clear and honest mind sees deepest into the meaning of things. It finds the way in which God works and moves because it is ever seeking to know what is right and true. Every vision of truth is a vision of God.

"Thou breathest in the rushing wind,
Thy spirit stirs in leaf and flower;
Nor wilt Thou from the willing mind
Withhold Thy light and love and power."

How did Eli die? Must he not have known what these words mean from the book of Proverbs: "A foolish son is a grief to his father, and a bitterness to her that bare him"? (chapter xvii. 25.) Also these words, "A foolish son is the calamity of his father"? (xix. 13.) This same book tells us that a wise son makes a glad father. It might have added, a glad and happy mother also. Should not our love for father and mother make us eager to do the things we know they want us to do and to live the kind of life we know they want us to live? In this way we may make their hearts glad, and dedicate ourselves to God in a true and acceptable way.

"Hushed was the evening hymn,
The temple courts were dark,
The lamp was burning dim
Before the sacred ark:
When suddenly a voice divine
Rang through the silence of the shrine."

"The old man, meek and mild,
 The priest of Israel, slept;
 His watch the temple-child,
 The little Levite, kept;
 And what from Eli's sense was sealed,
 The Lord to Hannah's son revealed.

"Oh, give me Samuel's ear,
 The open ear, O Lord,
 Alive and quick to hear
 Each whisper of Thy word!
 Like him to answer at Thy call,
 And to obey Thee first of all."

XXIV. Choosing a King.

(JUDGES IX.; 1 SAMUEL VIII.-XI.)

Explanation.

If you turn to the chapters in 1 Samuel given above, you will see that there are three different accounts of the way Saul was made king. The first (ix. 10-17) says that he was out in search of his father's asses, and came to a place called Zuph, where Samuel, the seer, anointed him king.

The second (x. 17-27) tells us that different tribes came together at Mizpah, and in some way lots were cast, and the lot fell first upon the tribe of Benjamin, and then upon Saul. The third (xi.) says that, after Saul had won a great victory over the Ammonites, all the people came together for a sacrificial feast at Gilgal, and there they made Saul king before the Lord.

This last is probably nearest to the fact, as it is in accord with the natural way of making kings. After Gideon had won a victory over the Midianites the Israelites wanted to make him king (Judges viii. 22-23). Always in primitive society it is the successful warrior who is thought best qualified to rule.

But so long as we bear in mind that we are dealing with legends, and not historical verity, it matters little which account

we use in presenting the lesson. As far as possible, we may do what the ancient compiler tried to do; that is, present the three as one. In the last we have Saul leaving his plow, like the Roman farmer-patriot, Cincinnatus, going forth to win a victory for his people and for himself a crown. In the first story we have him going out in search of lost asses and finding a kingdom. In both cases it is the man in humble position rising to the highest place because it is seen that he is the man of the hour. The rail-splitter becomes president when it is believed that he is the man for that place, that he can serve his country better there than elsewhere, or better than anybody else. This is a familiar lesson, but one to be impressed upon the mind of each new generation.

The speech ascribed to Samuel in chapter viii. 10-18, describing the manner of kings with their subjects, was probably written in the time of Solomon, when the writer had an example before him. We should not expect such elaborate formalism and classification of service in the home of a herdsman or plowman-ruler, like Saul. He would not himself be at ease in such surroundings.

The choosing of a king marked an advance in the condition of Israel, and was, as we see, an inevitable step in the development of the nation, but, like all advances, was opposed as an evil by the conservative party of the time. The tribes, like the American colonies, could do little or nothing against a strong foe so long as each one was for itself alone. It was only in union that they could exist as an independent people in their land of promise. The advice in Samuel's speech was good, but under the circumstances it was better honored in the breach than the observance. Still, the lesson of it is good for all time. Beware of putting too much power in the hands of tyrants: learn to rule yourselves instead of letting others rule you.

The thoughts, feelings, or purposes that we should choose to be the kings of our life may be dwelt upon in connection with this story.

Questions.

Can you recite the parable of the trees choosing a king and tell what it means?

Did Samuel, the seer, think it would be good for the Israelites to have a king?

What did he say a king would do to them?

Who was chosen to be the first king of Israel?

What was Saul in search of when he met the seer who made him king?

How did Samuel make him king?

What kind of a man and what kind of a king was Saul?

Application.

How many men and women can you think of who have risen from humble tasks to fill a large place in the world? Can you name some of the reasons or causes for this change in life? In every case was there not a great deal of courage and a strong will to do what should be done? Was there not also a great deal of patience, of quiet study and hard work? If you think of Columbus or Lincoln, or General Grant, or Emerson, our great American writer, you see that no great and lasting good is wrought in the world without great effort or much care in preparing for it. And, as Jesus said, it is those who are faithful in little things that can be trusted in great things.

Samuel seemed to make much of the fact that Saul was tall and handsome. But, if he had had nothing but this to commend him, Samuel would have made a great mistake in anointing him king. His height and beauty would not have won victories over Israel's enemies. The successful warrior must have thought, courage, will, and a certain power to make others believe in him and be glad to follow him as a true leader. Saul must have had some of this power, or he would never have been thought of for king. If he had had more of these qualities, he would have made a bigger and better king. Isn't it better to be fit for a big place and not be in it than to be in it and not be fit for it?

"True worth is in being, not seeming,
In doing each day that goes by
Some little good, not in dreaming
Of great things to do by and by.

“For whatever men say in blindness,
 And spite of the fancies of youth,
 There is nothing so kingly as kindness
 And nothing so royal as truth.”

How is it in our own minds,—do we ever choose the thought or feeling we will have for our king or ruler? Sometimes—not very often, I hope—we are cross, peevish, fretful, and it seems to our parents or to our friends or playmates as if we had said to the bramble-bush temper: Come, and rule over me to-day. I will do just what you say. If you bid me be angry or sulky or to snap and snarl at those about me, I will do it. And, if we have ever been in such a state, we know how miserable such a king can make us.

At other times it seems as if we had said to the spirit of love, of gladness and good cheer, Come, and rule over me; what you bid me do, that I will do with all my mind and heart. And in the service of such a king how good is life and what a joy it is to be alive!

“The king of love my shepherd is,
 Whose goodness faileth never;
 I nothing lack if I am his,
 And he is mine forever.”

XXV. The Boy and the Giant.

(1 SAMUEL XVI., XVII.)

Explanation.

While we should be in a sea of trouble if we undertook to reconcile the different legends of David in the Bible, we have a pretty clear picture of him in our minds. This picture may be very unlike the real David, but of this we can never tell, since we have no knowledge of him apart from these legends that floated about in the popular imagination some two or three hundred years before they were written out in the form in which they come to us.

If we were asked who killed Goliath, we could not say for certain, as 1 Samuel xvii. says it was David, while 2 Samuel

xxi. 19 says it was Elhanan. One legend tells us that David first came to Saul as a musician, "a mighty man of valor," prudent and handsome, and that Saul "loved him greatly," while another tells us that after he killed Goliath, which was after this, Saul does not know him, but asks, Whose son is this lad?

These are samples of discrepancies in the legends, but they do not trouble us so long as we remember that they are legends and not histories. From the historical point of view, what could be more childish than to think of a giant ten feet high, clad in heavy armor, with a spear whose "staff was like a weaver's beam, and whose head weighed six hundred shekels of iron," going up to the top of a hill and shouting to the enemy on an opposite hill: Ho, you! Why are ye here in battle array? Send down a man into the valley to fight with me. If I kill him, ye shall be our slaves. If he kills me, we will be your slaves. This is great as a legendary picture, but it is not war.

But because of this free use of the imagination we may get better pictures and perhaps truer ideas of an age or a people than a historian whose mind was hampered with facts could possibly give. We see in the Davidic legends a most engaging figure, whose exploits often shock our moral sense, but whose life is full of adventure and whose brave deeds achieve lasting glory for his people. Even though we cannot think of him as a poet writing the immortal Twenty-third Psalm, as a daring and resourceful leader, changing misfortune into fortune, triumphing where defeat seems inevitable, he fills the imagination, and fascinates us as the man for his time after the heart of the God he worshiped. We recognize in him the elemental forces of humanity that in every age make the strength of strong men.

In our story he appears as a ruddy youth, clear in eye and strong in limb, defying the paw of the lion and the paw of the bear, and bringing the mighty Philistine giant to the ground with the white stone from his sling. This is what youth can do when it hears the voice of Duty whisper, Thou must, and answers back, I can. There is no old giant clothed

in armor, however strong, made for him by church or state or conventional society, that can stand up against a youth who has the fire of heaven in his heart, the light of intelligence in his eye, and believes with all his mind and soul that he is battling for the living God. This is the lesson of the Boy and the Giant, and you cannot make too much of it.

The story of the anointing of David by Samuel was told to show that David had divine authority to rule. The writer wished it to appear that the spirit of God left Saul and came upon David, so that he had the true, kingly succession. The same idea appears in some churches under the phrase "apostolic succession." If it ever happened, it could mean little or nothing to a mind like David's. He made himself king. The priest generally comes in to confirm what has already happened. He rarely takes the lead in anything.

Questions.

Why did not Samuel anoint Jesse's oldest son as king?

What kind of a boy was David?

What deeds of daring did he do as a boy?

How did he kill Goliath?

What did the Philistines do when they saw the giant fall?

What did the Israelites do?

Application.

You have seen bears and lions in cages, and you were not afraid of them because you knew they could not touch you. If you were to see them out in the field or forest, you would be afraid, probably, and run away as fast as ever you could. Shepherd boys living in countries where they exist are very much afraid of them. They hear stories about boys, as well as sheep and goats, being carried off by them, and with these pictures in their minds they do not like to get very far from home.

But these beasts are themselves great cowards, and if a person bravely faces them, they will generally run away. It may have been in this way that David escaped, as he said, out of their paws. It is this way with the troubles and trials of

life. If we are afraid and run away, they run after us, and are ready to devour us up. But, if we bravely face them, they get away as fast as they can. Did you ever have that experience with a tough duty, a bad habit, a hard lesson, a strong temptation to do what you knew you ought not to do and to leave undone what you knew you should do?

David prepared himself to meet Goliath by his bravery on the hillside minding his sheep. The greatest troubles and obstacles tumble when we go at them with a determined spirit. There is nothing, said Jesus, impossible to the man of faith. If he say to the mountain, Be thou removed into the sea, it will obey him. This means just what the story of the Boy and the Giant means, and that is that you can do great things if you only think you can, and prepare yourself for it.

Nothing is gained by boasting. Goliath boasted, and he fell. His heavy armor and mighty spear and his great stature and strength availed not against David's clear eye and skill in the use of the sling. You cannot count on any outward thing. Your power must be in yourself.

"Boys of spirit, boys of will,
Boys of muscle, brain, and power,
Fit to cope with anything:
These are wanted every hour."

XXVI. The Two Friends.

(I SAMUEL XVIII.-XX.)

Explanation.

The story shows us how kings were made, and how they behaved in the time when they were little more than warrior chieftains. A man with a natural love of adventure and the gift of leadership, delighting in war as his native element, attaches others to him, and becomes "a mighty man of valor" because of his victories over a common enemy. It was in this way that Saul came to be king. While he is on the throne, David comes to the front as a natural-born fighter and leader. So great is his power that Saul takes him into his service, makes him a commander in his army, and there he does so

valiantly that the people begin to say that he is greater than Saul, and would make a better king. At length Saul fears and distrusts him, and such is the clamor of the people for David that the king sees no hope for him and his sons, if this ambitious fighter is allowed to live. His jealousy becomes so great that it becomes his set purpose to kill David.

But Jonathan believes in David, loves and trusts him, so they make a covenant of friendship together (1 Samuel xviii. 3, 4, xx. 11-17).

There are improbable and inconsistent things in the different versions of their friendship, but it is better not to comment on these, as we might thereby mar a beautiful classic without gaining anything of value by so doing. It is a delightful picture of love unfeigned in a setting of savagery. It is one of the Old Testament gems that every child should have firmly set in his mind.

The song with which the women greeted Saul and David was probably a fragment of an antiphonal hymn sung with tambourine accompaniment, one set of women singing, Saul has slain his thousands, and the other set answering, David has slain his tens of thousands. Such a song would naturally make Saul jealous of David.

The evil of jealousy, anger, hatred, and bad temper, and the beauty and benefactions of friendship, may be dwelt upon in this lesson. Emerson's essay and poem on Friendship may suggest thoughts that you can use to advantage.

Questions.

With whom did David live after he killed Goliath?

When Saul was moody and out of temper, what did David do for him?

What else did he do for the king?

Who became his wife? and what did she do to save him from the wrath of the king?

Who became his fast friend while he was in the king's house?

How did Jonathan show his friendship for David?

Application.

One, a king's son, the other a shepherd's boy, why do you suppose Jonathan and David loved each other? Can you

always tell why you like one person more than another? Do you think you could be friendly with one whose interests and ways of life were totally different from your own? Though David and Jonathan were unlike in position and training, we may believe they had similar tastes and enjoyed the same pleasures, or their souls would not have been "knit together" for life, as they were. It is the boy or girl that you like to be with, who likes to do the things that you like to do, to see the things you like to see, to read the books you like to read, that you naturally take for a friend.

And another thing is necessary to friendship, and that is trust. Jonathan and David believed in each other, and always stood true to each other. Had either proven deceitful or been in any way false to the other, their friendship would have been broken. If we want true friends, we must be friendly and be always true to our friends. To say things about them that we would not say to them is to spoil all.

"Straight between them ran the pathway,
Never grew the grass upon it;
Singing birds, that utter falsehoods,
Story-tellers, mischief-makers,
Found no eager ear to listen,
Could not breed ill-will between them,
For they kept each other's counsel,
Spake with naked hearts together."

Again and again Jonathan put in danger his own life, that he might save David. Greater love, said Jesus, hath no man than this, that he is ready to lay down his life for his friend. And such friendship makes life more beautiful, sweet, and good. Do you know what these lines of Emerson mean?

"O friend, my bosom said,
Through thee alone the sky is arched,
Through thee the rosé is red;
All things through thee take nobler form,
And look beyond the earth,
The mill-round of our fate appears
A sun-path in thy worth."

And is it not good to think that "every one can have a friend who himself knows how to be a friend"?

"How blest the sacred tie that binds,
In union sweet, according minds!
How swift the heavenly course they run,
Whose hearts and faith and hopes are one!"

XXVII. The Outlaw.

(1 SAMUEL XXII.-XXIV., XXVI., XXVII., XXX.—2 SAMUEL I.)

Explanation.

Afraid to remain longer at court, David finds a hiding-place in the cave of Adullum. A cave in the wilderness was the favorite retreat of those who would escape the hand of the government. In the time of the Civil War men fled into the mountains to avoid being drafted for the army.

David's relatives came to him in the cave, fearing that the wrath of Saul might reach even to them. He took his father and mother to Mizpeh, and put them into the custody of the king of Moab, asking him to care for them until he himself learned "what God was going to do for him. And they dwelt with the king of Moab all the while that David was in the hold." Observe this thoughtfulness of the outlaw for his parents.

The poor, the oppressed, the discontented, those with grievances of one kind or another, gathered themselves unto him and he became their leader. Now he is the Rob Roy or Robin Hood of the Hebrew legends; and he with his band of five or six hundred malcontents, "without visible means of support," must have been a terror to the people roundabout. Many accounts are given of their exploits and of the spoil that was divided after their raids upon their neighbors. We are not, however, to think of them in this as being so much worse than others; for freebooting was the fashion of the time, the custom of the country.

It was a wild, free life of daring adventure that these outlaws lived, and it seemed to fit David as the skin the hand; and we can well believe that in his old age he looked back

upon it as the merriest period in his whole career. Observe that, while an outlaw, he still fought for his people (xxiii.).

The two stories of David having Saul in his hands, yet sparing his life, are so much alike that it is thought by some that they are two traditions of one event (1 Samuel xxiv., xxvi.). This may be the case, but it does not matter. The spirit and purpose of the two are the same; and, if such a thing could happen once, it might happen a dozen times.

We are to observe in them not only the nobleness of David in rendering good for evil, but also the nobleness of Saul in acknowledging the magnanimity of David: "Is this thy voice, my son David? Thou art more righteous than I, for thou hast rewarded me good, whereas I have rewarded thee evil."

It would be well to read these fine passages over two or three times in the class, letting one pupil read what David said and another what Saul said.

But, while Saul speaks thus nobly in his better moods, David knows that he will not be safe when the dark mood of jealousy comes again to the king, and so, to save his life, he and his followers go over to Israel's enemy, the Philistines, and are sent to an outlying post called Ziklag (xxvii.-xxviii. 2).

Here he receives news of the death of Saul and Jonathan, and then goes back to Hebron to be crowned king. The hymn of praise of Saul and Jonathan with which he laments their death shows his real feeling for them.

The experiences of an outlaw, thoughtfulness for relatives, returning good for evil, may be dwelt upon, with this story as an illustration.

Questions.

Where did David go when he left the court of Saul?

What did he do with his father and mother?

Who joined him in the cave of Adullam?

What kind of life did he then lead?

What does he do to Saul when he finds him asleep in the cave? and also in a trench?

Why does he spare the king's life?

Where did he go finally to be out of the reach of Saul?

What news came to him there, and how did he feel when he heard of it?

Application.

Do you think you would like to have been one of David's band of outlaws? Do you like camping out? What is the charm of such life? Freedom, no care, no hard work, just doing what you want to do. This is good for a little while in the summer; but how would you like it the year round? How would it be in the winter? Suppose you had no one to bring you food or clothing, but had to go out and get everything you needed yourself, would there be only pleasure in such life? David did not mind about his supplies. Whenever he needed anything, he and his men made a raid on some of the tribes about, and got what they wanted. Then those who were the losers had to suffer. Our consciences would not let us do this. We would not like to feast on what belonged by right to others, knowing that others were suffering for the want of it.

When you think of it, are you not glad that you do not live as an outlaw in cave or camp, but as a law-keeping boy or girl in a comfortable home? If so, ought we not to love and obey our parents, and do all we can to make our home-life pleasant, sweet, and good?

"There is beauty all around,
When there's love at home;
There is joy in every sound,
When there's love at home.

"Peace and plenty there abide,
Smiling fair on every side;
Time doth softly, sweetly glide,
When there's love at home."

What did Saul say to David when he learned that David might have taken his life, but did not? Does not his answer show that he had true and tender feeling in his heart?

"There's never a garden growing
With roses in every plot;
There's never a heart so hardened
But it has one tender spot;
We have only to prune the border
To find the forget-me-not."

With what did the apostle Paul say we should overcome evil? How many ways can you think of in which you can overcome evil with good? If you say a kind word of one or to one who says an unkind word about you or to you, or do a kind act to one who does an unkind act to you, would not that be overcoming evil with good? What did Jesus say we should do when evil is done to us? Forgive seventy times seven times. What would ever lead one to do this? Must it not be a great love in the heart?

XXVIII. A King and his Rebel Son.

(2 SAMUEL II.-VI., IX., XV.-XIX. 9.)

Explanation.

After the death of Saul, David became king of the tribe of Judah at the south, with his home at Hebron (2 Samuel ii. 1-8), while a son of Saul, Ishbosheth, was anointed king over the northern tribes (2 Samuel ii. 8-10). "Now there was long war between the house of Saul and the house of David; and David waxed stronger and stronger, but the house of Saul waxed weaker and weaker" (2 Samuel iii. 1).

This guerilla war continued seven and a half years, when at last Ishbosheth was assassinated, and David was made king over all the tribes of Israel (v. 1-5). Now for the first time in their history the Hebrews are a nation, with a king like other nations, such as they wanted to be when they asked Samuel to choose a king for them.

The first act of the "king of all the tribes" was to capture the fortress on the double hill afterward known as Mount Zion and Mount Moriah. The Jebusites were driven far away, and the name of the place was changed from Jebus to Jerusalem. It was near the center of the united kingdom, and here David came to live and it was henceforth the capital of the nation. It was commonly referred to as the "City of David," the "city of the Great King."

It was still thought that God dwelt in and about the ark,

and by bringing it to Jerusalem David believed that he was bringing the God of Israel to his new capital. Dancing before it was dancing before the Lord of hosts.

The better side of David's character is shown in his provision for the crippled son of his friend Jonathan. He did not forget his promise (chapter ix.).

The book of 2 Samuel holds the mirror up to nature, and what we see as we look into it does not give us a favorable impression of the princes of the house of David nor of life in general in the time of his reign. The conspiracy of his favorite son, Absalom, opens the door upon the royal household. We take one look, and are ready to turn away. This son, so like his sire, and who "by his fair speeches and courtesies stealeth the hearts of Israel," interests us because of his beauty, and because his methods were so like those of ambitious office-seekers in the political life of our day. His rebellion was natural to such a vain and short-sighted prince. His ambition would not let him abide his father's time. Could he have done so, he might have been accepted as the rightful king. He was in the main a son after David's own heart, and David loved him with all his heart.

Dwell upon the king's counsel to his generals, "Deal gently for my sake with the young man, even with Absalom." David was a mixture of good and evil. He could be hard and cruel: he could be gentle and merciful. He could rejoice in bloody slaughter: he could weep over the downfall of an enemy. He could revenge the slightest wrong to himself a hundred-fold: he could forgive the greatest wrong even to the uttermost. He could be exacting to the last drop of blood: he could be generous to a fault.

Lack of space makes it impossible in this lesson, as in the last, to so much as refer to many acts which show the tenderer and deeper side of his character. Read 1 Samuel and 2 Samuel, and you will find many things that you can use to advantage in presenting the Davidic stories. For these a map is indispensable.

True and false ambition as shown both in the character of David and of his rebel son, the wrong use of power, loyalty

to the memory of those who have been kind to us, dealing gently with the erring, the sin of vanity, are lesson suggestions for this story.

Questions.

What city did David make the capital of the nation after he became king?

How was the ark taken up to Jerusalem?

What did David do for his friend Jonathan's son?

Which one of David's sons led a rebellion against him?

How did this son die?

What did David do when he heard of his death?

Application.

We naturally love what is beautiful in form, color, or action. We like to look upon a beautiful child, a beautiful boy or girl, a beautiful plant or tree, a beautiful sunset or landscape. The beauty of a flower is, as Emerson said, its own excuse or reason for being. The actions of a kitten at play are beautiful. The actions of children at play are beautiful. Are they always? When are they beautiful and when not? What would you call a beautiful deed? Absalom was beautiful in form. Was he beautiful in character, in acts? Would you not rather have a beautiful mind or soul than a beautiful body?

Absalom was proud of his fine figure, his long, heavy hair; and he seemed to think because he was handsome he was fit to be king. What did this vanity lead to? Death on a tree. Beauty of form or feature is not something we earn or acquire, but is a gift of nature. If we have it, we ought to be glad and grateful for it; but we ought not to expect credit or praise for it. If we are not careful, it may do us great harm.

But beauty of soul we may increase by our good thoughts and deeds; and, the more we have of it, the happier we shall be. Do you want to be handsome? Then remember that "Handsome is that handsome does," that

"Duty, not pleasure, must lead,
And try every day to be perfect indeed."

Absalom was ambitious to be king. This led him to rebel against his father. We are told that twenty thousand men fell in the forest of Ephraim in a single battle between the soldiers of Absalom and those of David. Absalom himself was of the number. That was what ambition meant in his case. What did Cardinal Wolsey say it meant to him? The end of all his greatness. "By that sin fell the angels," etc. (Henry VIII., Act III. Scene 2.)

But there is good ambition as well as bad. On the playground you admire the good pitcher, the good catcher, the good batter. When you play at any game, you want to do your best; you try to do your best, otherwise you are no good at the game.

A teacher likes to see a scholar ambitious to get on well in his studies; and we all like to see a boy or girl ambitious to do the best things in the best way. It is a high and worthy ambition to try to excel in what we know to be good and true.

"Onward, onward may we press
Through the path of duty;
Virtue is true happiness,
Excellence true beauty."

XXIX. The Wise King.

(1 KINGS I.-XII.)

Explanation.

When David was old and too feeble to rule, his son Adonijah was made king by one political faction, but another party chose Solomon, and David confirmed the latter choice. Solomon is thus made king at the early age of twenty. He promises to spare Adonijah and the principal men supporting his claim to the throne, but he takes an early opportunity to forget his promises, and they are all disposed of (1 Kings i., ii.). Like a ruler in a later time, he can say that he has no enemies, as he has snipped off all their heads.

His prayer for a wise and understanding heart was prayed

for him long after he himself had ceased to pray. It is foreign to his whole character and spirit, but is such a prayer as a wise and good man, living some two or three hundred years after Solomon's time, thought a young man of twenty would pray on taking the throne. It is a beautiful ideal, and we cannot make too much of it before the minds of the young.

Because of the material magnificence of his reign, it became the fashion to ascribe whatever the imagination could conceive that was great and glorious in piety, wisdom, and worldly riches and splendor to Solomon. In the traditions "he was wiser than all men," and "all kings of the earth came to hear his wisdom" (1 Kings iv. 29-34); "he exceeded them all in riches and wisdom" (x. 23); and, again, the word is "there was none like thee before thee, neither after thee shall any arise like unto thee" (iii. 12).

The story of the queen of Sheba (x. 1-10) and the story of judging the mothers (1 Kings iii. 16-28), as well as many of the sayings ascribed to him, show that his wisdom was not of the kind celebrated in Proverbs iii. 13-18, nor the kind hypostatized in the Wisdom of Solomon, chapter vii., nor the kind spoken of in the New Testament as coming from above (James iii. 17), but consisted chiefly of a rude and ready wit in propounding and answering conundrums and enigmas, in sagacity, shrewdness, and cunning,—the kind which the prophets despised and Paul scorned as "fleshly" or worldly wisdom. He was doubtless the author of many wise and witty sayings, and royal guests may often have been worsted in the keen encounter of wits at his table; but he is no longer thought of by scholars as the writer of the book of Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, or the Song of Songs. Besides other things in the book of Proverbs there are various collections of pithy sayings that came, like the Psalms, out of the experiences of the people. Read some of them to the class. See Bible for Learners, vol. ii., chapter vii., page 80.

Architects cannot reconstruct a temple from the descriptions of Solomon's in Kings and Chronicles. According to 1 Kings vi. it was a little more than 100 feet long, 35 in width, and 50 high. This would not be a very imposing structure.

Many a country meeting-house might rival it in size, and it would be only a toy temple compared with St. Peter's at Rome. But, as we read of it in the Bible, we get the impression of magnificence, as we do of Solomon's palace and of the great king himself. And this is what the writer wanted us to have. It was glorious in the eyes of the people, and we may rejoice with them as we see it in their vision.

Solomon was a man of peace, not a fighter like his father, David, but a builder. In his reign Israel reached the height of national glory, and Jerusalem was celebrated far and near for its great and beautiful edifices.

But all this required money and labor, and the people came at length to groan under their burdens. This outward glory could attract and dazzle, but it could not feed hungry mouths nor satisfy the deeper longings of the soul. We are not surprised that the kingdom came to an end with the end of Solomon.

That we have to pay for what we get or let others get for us, the strength of moral and spiritual ideals as contrasted with worldly power, the value and beauty of wisdom, or the gain of the understanding heart, are lesson-topics that may be considered with the story of the Wise King.

Questions.

How old was Solomon when he became king?

What did he ask God for in his dreams?

Did he have riches, wisdom, and fame?

What great houses did he build, and how long did it take to build them?

What part did he take in the dedication of the temple?

Did he leave his kingdom strong and united?

Application.

What is it to have a wise and understanding heart? If you know how to live so that your life is a joy to you and a joy to others, doesn't that come pretty near it? What would a wise boy do? Do you think he would speak and act just as he happened to feel at the moment? that is if he were cross or peevish, would snap out whatever came into his mind with no

thought of how much it might hurt others, or, if of a sudden he felt that he wanted to do a certain thing, would drop everything else and do it, no matter what would happen to him or anybody else? Would he not rather control his tongue, think before he speaks, look ahead, and consider how what he does to-day may affect to-morrow? Would he not have his eyes open, and learn something every day from the things about him? Would he not try to make the most of his opportunities in school, in his home, in church and Sunday School? And in all this would not a wise girl do much the same as a wise boy?

An old writer said, The desire of discipline is the beginning of wisdom. By discipline he meant studying, reading, thinking, using the mind and the will. One who likes to do this will become wise, just as one who loves the study of music will become a musician.

“Happy is the man that findeth wisdom,
 And the man that getteth understanding;
 For the merchandise of it is better than the merchandise of silver
 And the gain thereof than fine gold.
 She is more precious than rubies;
 And all the things thou canst desire are not to be compared unto her.
 Length of days is in her right hand;
 And in her left hand riches and honor.
 Her ways are ways of pleasantness,
 And all her paths are peace.
 She is a tree of life to them that lay hold upon her;
 And happy is every one that retaineth her.” (Proverbs iii. 13-18.)

We have not a great kingdom, like Solomon, to rule over, but each one of us has a little kingdom to govern, and we need to pray every day for a wise and understanding heart, that we may rule it well.

“A little kingdom I possess,
 Where thoughts and feelings dwell;
 And very hard I find the task
 Of governing it well.

"For passion tempts and troubles me,
 A wayward will misleads,
 And selfishness its shadow casts
 On all my words and deeds.

"How can I learn to rule myself,
 To be the child I should,
 Honest and brave, nor ever tire
 Of trying to be good?
 How can I keep a sunny soul
 To shine along life's way?
 How can I tune my little heart
 To sweetly sing all day?

"Dear Father, help me with the love
 That casteth out my fear!
 Teach me to lean on Thee and feel
 That Thou art very near:
 That no temptation is unseen,
 No childish grief too small,
 Since Thou with patience infinite
 Doth soothe and comfort all.

"I do not ask for any crown
 But that which all may win;
 Nor try to conquer any world
 Except the one within.
 Be Thou my guide until I find,
 Led by a tender hand,
 Thy happy kingdom in myself,
 And dare to take command."

XXX. A Bold Prophet.

(I KINGS XVII.-XIX.)

Explanation.

The story of Elijah takes us into the very thick of the contest between the worship of the Canaanite god, Baal, and the worship of the Hebrew Lord. The Israelites had to contend with the different tribes in Canaan, win a foothold, and then

become the masters of the land. Along with this political struggle was the conflict between the two religions.

Baal means "Lord" or "Master," and is thought to be the name of the Sun-god common to the Canaanite tribes. It is a part of the name of many gods, places, and persons, and appears in many Hebrew names, showing the influence of this religion upon the Israelites. Many of them adopted Baalism, as they did other customs and usages of the country. The kings who took wives from the Canaanites were partial to it, and put its priests and prophets on an equal footing with those of the Hebrew religion. Solomon not only offered sacrifice at Baal shrines, but built temples to this god.

But the Hebrew prophets and teachers were opposed to this practice, and insisted that all the misfortunes, defeats, and calamities of Israel came from neglect of the Hebrew Lord and following after these strange gods.

The worship of Baal was largely a glorification of the productive powers of nature, with little or no moral or spiritual element in it. It was a lower form of religion than that of the Israelites, for in Elijah's time the Lord of hosts desired righteousness in His worshippers.

As the leader of the prophetic party, Elijah with the wrath of heaven in his face set himself with all his might against Baalism. He was a stern prophet, with no element of compromise in his nature, and one who would give no quarter to the enemy. With him there was no halting between two opinions. It was either the Lord or Baal, and you must choose at once which you would serve. He was not only a preacher, but a doer of the word. He was indeed a god-man who had the power of God in his word. He had but to speak, it was done.

Fire was his favorite weapon for overcoming his enemies (2 Kings i. 5-12). In the contest with the priests of Baal he lets it be known that his God can do with fire what the Sun-god cannot do; that is, Baal is defeated on his own ground. As worshippers of the forces of nature, the Baal prophets would be expected to have power with them. But in this

Elijah showed himself their superior. He had but to speak the word, and the heavens are shut up so that there is neither dew nor rain for the space of three years. He could miraculously increase oil and meal and even raise the dead to life. The ravens bring him bread and meat when he is hungry.

The reform in which he was engaged was not accomplished in a day nor in the lifetime of a single prophet. There was long war between the house of Baal and the house of the Lord. But Elijah both by word and example wrought mightily for the house of the Lord. And all these stories show what an adoring imagination will do for a great man who has done great things for his race.

Lesson-topics: courage in the right; choosing between good and evil, right and wrong; droughts and misfortunes due to natural causes, not religious belief and worship; appreciation of a great leader and reformer.

Questions.

What kind of a man was Elijah?

What was the name of the king of Israel, of his wife, and of the god they worshiped?

How long did the drought last, and who was thought to be the cause of it?

Can you tell what took place on Mount Carmel between Elijah and the prophets of Baal?

What happened to Ahab before he reached home that day?

What did Jezebel threaten to do to Elijah when she heard of what he had done to her prophets?

Application.

Elijah had courage, and faced the king and told him what he ought to do, knowing that by this he put his own life in danger. We do not have to face kings who have power to harm us; but are there no experiences in our lives that require courage? How is it when we have done wrong and feel that we ought to tell father or mother or teacher about it? How is it when we have something to do and think others will laugh at us for doing it? How is it when we have to say no to play-

mates and friends when they ask us to do things which we want to do, but which we know that we ought not to do? How is it when we want to play and have to work instead? How is it when we know that we ought to stand up for some poor fellow that others are laughing at? How is it when you know that others will make fun of you and call you a coward because you do what is right and refuse to do what is wrong?

And, in all cases, when we have a hard thing to do, the best way is to do it at once and have it over with. If we are bold and attack it with our might, it will not be half as hard as we thought it would be. Dean Everett said an old farmer used to tell his boys, when they had a tough bit of wood to split, to strike right at the middle of the knot. What do you think of this as a rule for life?

All through life we have to choose between what is true and false, what is good and bad, right and wrong; and the joy of life depends upon the wisdom of our choosing. If we choose the false instead of the true, we are apt to go from one error and mistake to another, and there is no order in our thinking or acting. But, if we choose what is true and follow it, it will give meaning and beauty to life. So with the good and the bad, the right and the wrong.

“Dare to do right! dare to be true!
You have a work that no other can do;
Do it so bravely, so kindly, so well,
Angels will hasten the story to tell.

“Dare to do right! dare to be true!
Other men's failures can never save you;
Stand by your conscience, your honor, your faith,
Stand like a hero, and battle till death.

“Dare to do right! dare to be true!
God sees your faith and will carry you through;
Keeping His loving help ever in sight,
Can you not dare to be true and do right?”

XXXI. A Prophet's Disciple.

(1 KINGS XIX.; 2 KINGS II., IV., VI., XIII.)

Explanation.

Knowing the character of Jezebel, Elijah "went for his life" to a wilderness near Beërsheba, threw himself down under a juniper-tree and "requested for himself that he might die." What follows in 1 Kings xix. is a poetically dramatic setting forth of the experience of a great soul. He had been exceeding jealous for the Lord of hosts, but now it seemed as if his work had all come to naught. All Israel had gone after the false gods, and the savage queen would hunt him to his death. He was utterly discouraged, his heart full of wrath, bitterness, and despair. Of this state the wind-storm, the earthquake, and the fire are typical. What were all his struggles, his fierce contentions with the enemy, but sound and fury, signifying nothing?

This mood passes. He becomes calm and can use his reason and see things as they are. In the quiet of his own soul he hears the voice that says: Be of better cheer. The case is not as hopeless as it seems. You are not the only good or faithful spirit left in Israel. There are many who have not bowed the knee to Baal nor kissed that hated image of fire. What can you do here away from the scene of action? Go back to your post of duty, and do the things that still remain to be done.

Thus hope revives in the prophet's heart, and he goes back to his work, no jot of his zeal abated. Ahab finds him a greater terror to his guilty conscience than before. (See 1 Kings xxi.) To get a true picture of the grandeur of Elijah as a prophet of God, all that is said of him in the two books of Kings should be read.

The story of his going to heaven in a chariot of fire makes a fitting close to such an heroic life. How rich is the nation that has such a tradition as this of Elijah for its inspiration! You cannot make your class too familiar with it.

The phrase, "the chariot of Israel and the horsemen thereof," applied to both Elijah and Elisha seemingly as a title suggests an invisible host ever ready to aid God's servants. We may use it as a poetical expression of God's care for all His children. There are for each one of us more helps than we can ever use or see.

In the little drama of Elisha on his death-bed the dying prophet sought to teach king Joash that great things could be done only by determined will and perseverance.

That the voice that speaks to us out of calm reflection is to be trusted rather than the voice of strife and contention, the need of courage, the glory of a quiet, serviceable life, overcoming enemies with kindness, our invisible helpers, persistence in purpose and effort, are lesson-topics that may be dwelt upon in connection with this story of Elijah and Elisha.

Questions.

Where did Elijah go after his victory over the prophets of Baal?

What were his experiences on Mount Horeb?

What did the still, small voice tell him to do?

What did he do to Elisha when he found him plowing in the field?

What did Elisha do to the Syrians when they came to Dothan to capture him?

What lesson did Elisha on his death-bed give king Joash?

Application.

When you are shouting, you can't hear much but your own noise. When boys get excited over a game, one side accusing the other of not playing fair, there is a great deal of loud talk, and they declare with great show of spirit that they will never play together again. But, when this storm-wind of passion has passed by, they have a different feeling about it. They see that there was not much meaning in the noise, and, on the whole, they are rather ashamed of it. When they quietly think the matter over, the still, small voice of reason is heard, and either team is ready to meet the other when the opportunity comes. In the bigger matters of life it may be something like this. Do you know what it is to be discouraged, to fail in what

you have tried to do and to feel that it is no use for you to try again? If so, perhaps you were a good deal disturbed by it, and were inclined to fret and worry and scold and blame everybody but yourself for your trouble. When feeling that way, no cheering voice came to you. But that feeling passed. You thought of something else for a time, it may be, and then, when your mind was calm, it came back again to the thing that troubled you, and to your surprise the trouble had gone. You saw that you could do what you thought before you could not do at all. In the quiet time the mind found the answer you wanted, the way out of the difficulty. God is in the still, small voice, not in the big noise.

We all have in us the still, small voice to cheer us when we do right, to make us ashamed when we do wrong.

"The still, small voice that speaks within,
I hear it, when at play
I speak the loud and angry word
That drives my friend away.

"If falsehood whispers to my heart
To tell a coward lie,
To hide some careless thing I've done,
I hear the sad voice nigh.

"If selfishness would bid me keep
What I should gladly share,
I hear again the inner voice,
And then with shame forbear.

"I thank thee, Father, for this friend,
Whom I would always heed;
Oh, may I hear the slightest tone
In every time of need."

Can you think of anything that helps you which you cannot see? How about the air? You cannot see it, yet you could not live without it. How about the influence of good people? How about good thoughts, ideas, feelings, the love of father and mother? All the good things of the world are ready to

help us, if only we will let them. They are "the chariots of God and the horsemen thereof."

Whether we have an enemy to overcome or a hard lesson to master or a big job to do, we have to have patience and power to keep at what we are doing when we would rather do something else. When you are older, you will read Lowell's poem on Columbus, and be reminded of what patience had to do with the discovery of America. General Grant would "fight it out on this line, if it took all summer." Joash must not expect to defeat his strong enemy with two or three trials of strength. He must be determined to win, and prepare for many struggles. This is the spirit that wins in the battle of life.

XXXII. A Little Maid.

(2 KINGS V.)

Explanation.

When Elijah said to Elisha, "Is there anything I can do for you before I die?" the answer was, "Give me a double portion of thy spirit." But this was what Elijah could not do, for Elisha was a different type of man from his master. The disciple was a citizen-prophet, more given to acts of benevolence than to reforming the national religion. He stood stoutly of course for the worship of the Lord of hosts, and, as the counsellor of kings, did what he could to keep them in the way of righteousness. There are more deeds of mercy ascribed to him in the traditions than to any other Old Testament hero. (Read 2 Kings.) Some of the things told of him are such as you find in fairy books. See 2 Kings vi. 1-7, where he makes an iron axe swim, and 2 Kings ii. 23-24, where the bears come out of the woods and devour forty-two little children because they shouted when he went by, "Go up, bald head, go up, bald head." Sometimes he is little more than a fortune-teller, a mind-reader, a faith-doctor. But these wonder-tales are the language of an appreciative imagination. We may use them, as we do fairy stories, to enforce a truth or to impress upon the mind a principle in morals or religion.

The suggestion of many of the New Testament miracle stories came from these of Elisha.

The story of the little maid is one of the best of the good stories told of this benevolent prophet. Its charm is in its simplicity and naturalness. It opens the door for us to look in upon the social life of the time. We see the commander-in-chief of the Syrian army, the highest position, next to the royal family, in the land. Among the slaves of the household is the Hebrew maid in attendance upon his wife. This great man, honorable and mighty, is afflicted with what was regarded then as now as an incurable disease. The slave-girl has heard of the miraculous cures of the prophet in the land from which she was taken, just as we hear of wonderful cures wrought by the mystery-doctors of our time. Naaman hears her stories, and, like other afflicted people whom the regular doctors have given up as incurable, he is ready to try any new thing that is recommended. So the king of Syria sends Naaman, with the letter and such presents as one king must make to another when seeking a favor, to the king of Israel. When one ruler demands impossible things of another, it means war, or plunder if the nation on which the demand is made is too weak for war. Naturally, the king of Israel is disturbed by the letter from Syria.

Elisha has his own house and servants. Chapter v. 11 shows the method of the faith-doctor of the time, but Elisha does not follow this method. The Hebrews have been long enough in the land to think of Jordan as the river of the Lord. Its water is holy. Seven is a sacred number, and seven dips in the holy river, and, lo! the miracle is wrought. This is all interesting as showing the life and thought of those days. It would be well to locate Syria and Damascus, its capital, on the map, at the north of Israel.

What on earth did Naaman want of that two mules' burden of earth? Wasn't there earth enough in Syria for an altar on which he could offer a sacrifice to God? This shows the belief of the time; namely, that each god was confined to his own locality and could be worshiped only on his own ground. It was necessary to take some of the sacred soil of Palestine to Damascus in order to bring Israel's God there.

That human nature will suffer either physically or morally in a palace as in a hut, the value of simple means and methods not only in the cure of our ills, but in promoting the moral and spiritual life, the religion of love and good works, are lessons suggested by this story.

Questions.

- Who was Naaman? With what disease was he afflicted?
- What did the Hebrew maid tell her mistress about the prophet in Samaria?
- To whom did the king of Syria send Naaman with a letter and presents?
- How was Naaman received by the king of Israel and by Elisha?
- What did Elisha tell him to do, and what did he think of the advice given him?
- What happened after he dipped himself seven times in Jordan?

Application.

Naaman is the mightiest man in his country next to the king, yet a little maid-servant in his house can tell him some things he does not know and point him the way to health and life. She is a missionary of her religion in a foreign land, and does what few missionaries ever do; that is, makes a distinguished convert. None of us are too young or too small to be messengers of truth and doers of kind and helpful deeds. What can you think of that you can do in this way?

Naaman had some very wise men with him, and they showed how wise they were when they said to him: If the prophet had bid you do some great thing, would you not have done it? How much more, then, when he says, Go to the nearest river, wash, and be clean! A celebrated doctor said that all that ninety-five patients out of every hundred need to do to get well is to take a brief but complete rest from both working and eating. Nothing could be more simple than this, yet it is about the last thing that most of us think of doing. It does not seem that we are doing anything unless we do the big thing.

In religion we sometimes forget that the simple truths are the great truths and the simple duties the most important duties. We think, if we could only do some great thing, then life would be glorious; but doing the simple duties of the common

day, in the spirit of love and cheer, why, there is no religion and no glory in that. But what was it that Jesus said about giving a cup of cold water to one of his little ones, not in the name of a master, but in the name of a disciple? (Matthew x. 42.) What do you think he meant by that? It was said of Jesus that he "went about doing good." Don't you think that is a good kind of religion? What did the apostle James say was pure and undefiled religion? (James i. 27.) To do little things with a fine spirit and purpose is to **make them great.**

"Suppose a little child should say,
 'Because I'm not a man,
 I will not try, in word or play,
 To do what good I can.'
 Dear child, each star some light can give,
 Though gleaming faintly there,
 Each rose-leaf helps the plant to live,
 Each dew-drop keeps it fair.

"And our good Father who's in heaven
 And doth all creatures view,
 To every little child has given
 Some needful work to do.
 Kind deeds towards those with whom you live,
 Kind words and actions bright,
 Shall, 'mid the world's worst darkness, give
 A little precious light."

XXXIII. The Two Boy Kings.

(2 KINGS XI., XII., XXII; 2 CHRONICLES XXIV.)

Explanation.

Athaliah was the daughter of Jezebel, and ruled her husband, king Jehoram, very much as her mother ruled king Ahab. She had the same ambitious spirit and aggressive character as her mother. Jehoram reigned but a few years, and their son, Ahaziah, but a few months; and then Athaliah took the reins of government. Her first act was to kill all her grand-

children and other princes of the blood, save Joash, who was rescued by his aunt, Jehosheba.

The high priest Jehoiada was his uncle by marriage. While Athaliah, unlike Jezebel, was a worshiper of the Hebrew God, she cared little for the temple and the priestly party. Jehoiada could not carry out his purposes so long as she was on the throne. He won the queen's body-guard to his side, and, as soon as the time was right for it, set the boy-prince on the throne and became himself regent of Judah. He had the power of both church and state in his hands, and, as he was a wise and honest man, both prospered under his rule. What he did, of course, was done in the name of the boy-king, and the credit of his wise acts was given to Joash.

Before his reign the priests were expected to keep the temple in repair from their fixed revenue. But, as they generally had uses for all they received, the temple suffered from neglect. But through his contribution-box at the altar Joash made an appeal to the people, and their generous response made it possible to restore the house of God. This meant a revival of interest in religion.

But, after Jehoiada died, "the princes of Judah came and made obeisance to the king; he listened to them. And they left the house of the Lord God of their fathers, and served groves and idols: and the wrath of God came upon Judah and Jerusalem for their trespass" (2 Chronicles xxiv. 17, 18). This shows the effect of bad company.

Two hundred years and more pass between the reign of the first boy-king and that of the second one in our story. Still the interest is in the temple and its worship. With all the fightings against it, Baalism still flourishes, and has found its way into the temple of the God of Israel. The chariot and horses of the Sun-god are there beside the altar of the Lord of hosts. But the reform party is more vigorous and more determined than ever, and Josiah, like Joash, is with it. He sees that the temple not only needs repairing, but its worship needs purifying, and, with the prophet Jeremiah for adviser, he goes at the work with all his might.

The Book of the Law found in the temple, which was

"more the occasion than the cause of the reformation," was written, it is believed, by some one in his reign, and ascribed to Moses to give it the sanctity of antiquity and the authority of a great name. It was probably our book of Deuteronomy iv. 45-xxvi., xxvii.-xxix. With the inspiration of this book and the power of the king, the Mosaic party was able to win a complete victory over the worshipers of the Canaanite gods, so that the religion against which Elijah strove so valiantly some two hundred years before was at last banished from the temple and the land once for all. It was a victory for a purer worship and a more righteous life.

The lesson suggestions are the advantage of having good advisers, the influence of bad companions, and what young people can do for the church and Sunday School.

Questions.

- How was Joash made king?
- Who was Jehoiada and what did he do for the boy-king?
- How did Joash get the money for repairing the temple?
- Who led him after the death of Jehoiada to worship Canaanite gods?
- How old was Josiah when he was made king?
- What did Hilkiah, the priest, find in the temple?
- What did the people agree to do in regard to this book?
- What did Josiah do for the religion of the temple and for all his kingdom?

Application.

Joash was not a strong-minded boy or man, so, when his good uncle, Jehoiada, died and the gay and pleasure-loving princes came about him, he could not stand against their influence, but fell into their ways, and thus undid in the last part of his life the good he did in the first part. If another boy or girl, or a half-dozen boys and girls try to get you to do what you feel that you ought not to do, what are you to say to them? Can you do them good and yourself, too, by saying, quietly, but firmly, I cannot do this thing that you ask me to do: it does not seem right, and I must be true to myself? We sometimes yield to temptation because we do not want to hurt

the feelings of others, but it is better to hurt other people's feelings when they ask us to do what we think is wrong than to hurt our own conscience; for, when conscience is hurt, there is no peace for us and we can give no joy or peace to others.

"Yield not to temptation,
For weakness is sin;
Each victory will help us
Some other to win.

"Shun evil companions,
Bad language disdain;
God's name hold in reverence,
Nor take it in vain."

"Be thoughtful and earnest,
Kind hearted and true;
Look up to the Father,
He'll carry you through."

The two boy-kings each did a good work for the temple, which was then what churches are to people to-day. What can you do for your church or your Sunday School? You can speak a good word for it whenever you have opportunity. You can be constant in your attendance at its services and try to find out the truths it teaches and make them live in what you say and do each day. You can bring money of your own earning or saving from your allowance for its support and its work, and have part in what it tries to do for those who need help and encouragement. How many ways can you think of in which you can help the church or Sunday School?

What has the church done for you? What has it done to make home-life pure and sweet? How much better should we be than savages if we did not have pleasant homes, good schools, and churches and Sunday Schools to keep our thoughts on whatsoever things are high, pure, and good? These are the pledge and promise of future good.

"The altar and the school still stand,
The sacred pillars of our trust."

XXXIV. Building a Wall.

(NEHEMIAH I.-VII.)

Explanation.

After the reign of Solomon his kingdom was divided, with Israel on the north and Judah on the south, each having its separate king. In or near 721 B.C. the Israelites at the north were captured by the Assyrians and led away as captives, and were ever afterward spoken of as the "Lost Tribes."

In 597 B.C. a great part of the people of Judah were carried away into Babylon and held as captives. In 538 B.C. Cyrus of Persia conquered Babylon, and two years later he gave the Hebrew captives permission to return to their home in Canaan. Many returned, but others preferred to stay in the land of their captivity. This latter class, however, did not forget the home country, and instilled into the minds of their children a great reverence for the fatherland.

Nehemiah was a descendant of one of those who did not return to Palestine. He had been taught the religion of his people. He had a strong feeling in his heart for "the place of his father's sepulchres." So when his brother with certain men from Judah came to the Persian court, and told him that the remnant of people left there were in great suffering and reproach, that the walls of the city were broken down and the gates thereof consumed with fire, he "sat down and wept, and for certain days mourned and fasted and prayed."

A king's eyes must behold nothing unpleasant, not even an unpleasant face. A subject, even if his heart is breaking, must wear nothing but smiles in the presence of royalty. The sad, man was also a subject of suspicion. It was assumed that his countenance was downcast because he was plotting evil. Observe how cleverly Nehemiah leads up to his subject and gets what he wants from the king. The cup-bearer is made governor of Judah. He travels with body-guard, and his word is law in Jerusalem.

He leaves nothing to chance, but learns the actual state of things before he begins operations or so much as lets it be

known what his purpose is. The enemy could not surprise him. "We made our prayer unto our God, and set a watch against them day and night." He could neither be frightened nor persuaded from the work he had come to do. He was a man of deeds rather than of words. He would not let the work stop, that he might discuss it with those who had rather see it fail than not.

Comment also on the fact that the builders, rich and poor alike, wrought not for pay, but for love of the city. "So we built the wall; for the people had a mind to work." He does not hesitate to let the workers know that he himself has made sacrifices for the good cause. Nor is he insensible of the fact that he has done a great work, and his prayer is, "Remember me, O my God, for good."

He showed cleverness, enterprise, courage, perseverance, zeal, great determination. These may serve as lesson-subjects along with thoughts of what we owe to the city or town in which we live.

Question.

What were Nehemiah's duties in the palace of the Persian king?

Why was he sad in the presence of the king?

What did the king give him permission to do?

What did he do at night after arriving in Jerusalem?

How did the people feel when he told them that he had come to build up the wall of the city, and what did they do?

Who tried to stop his work, and how did Nehemiah answer them?

How long did it take him to repair the wall?

Application.

If Nehemiah had been a half-hearted man, a timid man, or a man ready to listen to and follow the advice of those who were timid and half-hearted, he would never have built the wall. We must not pay too much attention to those who are ever ready to say, "Oh, this cannot be done," or "I doubt if it can be done," or "There is nothing in it, the plan is not worth considering or trying." Once in time of war a man was arrested and punished for being a discourager. He went about

among the officers and soldiers, telling them that the war was a failure, that it was all a mistake, and that there was no hope of victory, and painting everything in the darkest colors. In times of peace there are those who are inclined to show the same spirit. But those who have real work to do must not heed them any more than Nehemiah did Sanballat, Tobiah, and Geshem. In all conditions it is good to believe that something can be done, and to have courage to try to do what seems wisest and best. And courage not only to try once, but, "if at first you don't succeed, to try and try again." This is the spirit that builds the wall, that accomplishes things in the world.

"If boys should get discouraged
At lessons or at work,
And say, 'There's no use trying,'
And all hard tasks should shirk,
And keep on shirking, shirking,
Till the boy becomes a man,
I wonder what the world would do
To carry out its plan?

"The coward in the conflict
Gives up at first defeat;
If once repulsed, his courage
Lies shattered at his feet.
The brave heart wins the battle,
Because, through thick and thin,
He'll not give up as conquered:
He fights, and fights to win."

How many things can you think of that the town or city does for you? It protects your homes, gives you streets and lights them for you, provides parks and playgrounds, gives you books to read, furnishes you with schools, and will prepare you for college if you wish it to do so. But for it you would have neither peace nor liberty.

What can you do for it? You can show appreciation of what it does for you by making the best use of all the things it gives you. You can always have a good word for it and try

to make your life a credit to it. Now is the time for you to begin to prepare yourself for the duties which a good citizen has to do and does gladly out of love for the place that is his home.

And let us remember that it is with the city or town as with the great world: it does its best for us when we do our best for it.

"There are loyal hearts, there are spirits brave,
There are souls that are pure and true!
Then give to the world the best that you have,
And the best will come back to you."

We do not have to build city walls, for we live in a time of schools, governments, churches, and there is so much respect for each other's rights and so much obedience to law that they are not needed. But we all have to build something that is vastly more important than walls, and that is character.

"We are building every day
In a good or evil way,
And the structure as it grows
Will our inmost self disclose,

"Till in every arch and line
All our faults and failings shine;
It may grow a castle grand
Or a wreck upon the sand.

"Build it well, whate'er you do;
Build it straight and strong and true;
Build it clean and high and broad;
Build it for the eye of God."

XXXV. Four Loyal Captives.

(DANIEL I.-VI.)

Explanation.

It is the opinion of scholars that the book of Daniel was written to hearten the Jews in the reign of their mad persecutor, Antiochus Euphianes. It is composed of stories and

visions which may have been published as separate tracts at different times. The bulk of it was written, it is thought, not far from 164 B.C.

Antiochus believed that the only way to subdue the Jews and preserve unity throughout his empire was to destroy their religion and establish uniformity of worship. Many Jews could see little difference between Jehovah and Jupiter, and had already accepted the pagan religion along with the pagan philosophy and ideals of life. Others preferring to live without their religion than to die with it, or for it, became apostates at the command of the king. But a greater number would stand true to their faith at whatever cost. And, the more they resisted the decree of Antiochus, the more severely were they persecuted. He went to Jerusalem to superintend in person the persecutions, and it is said that more than 40,000 Jews perished in that city alone. He set up an altar of Jupiter in the temple court, and ordered them to offer sacrifices to this god, to work on the Sabbath, and to eat pork, all of which was inexpressibly abhorrent to a Jew.

But the author of the book of Daniel said: Our God is great, and mightier than all kings and persecutors. He triumphed over the enemies of Israel in the past, and he will give the faithful the victory in the end. For their encouragement he told his parables of the children in the fiery furnace and Daniel in the lions' den. He put his heroes back in the time of an earlier persecution of his people, and said in effect: As the hand of God was mighty to save then, so it will be now. He that endures to the end will see a glorious victory, for God is in the midst of all our trials.

Some who refused to bow the knee to Jupiter were burned alive. Observe the brave words which the writer puts into the mouth of the three who will not bow down to the image that Nebuchadnezzar set up: "If He will, the God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and He will deliver us out of thine hand, O king. But, if not, be it known unto thee, O king, that we will not serve thy gods, nor worship the golden image which thou hast set up."

Some of the loyal adherents to their faith were cast to the

wild beasts. But God is not only in the furnace, but in the den, and the mouths of the beasts are shut up even as the devouring flames were quenched. Daniel is victorious because his heart is true to God. The most wonderful part of this story is the decree of the king (chapter vi. 25-27). It is a bold flight of the imagination that sees an empire converted *en masse* by royal decree to the religion of one man. We must be careful not to offend the mind of a child by giving the impression that these things told of Daniel and his friends are real events instead of parables told for a religious purpose.

The story-tellers of the Bible seem to be fond of picturing their heroes as officers in the service of other nations. Joseph is viceroy in Egypt, Naaman commander-in-chief of the Syrian army, Nehemiah is cup-bearer to the king of Persia, "Mordecai, the Jew, was next unto King Ahasuerus," and Daniel was the first of the three presidents in the kingdom of Darius. This is the unconscious homage of a young and weak nation to an old and strong one. The greatest marvel in respect to the Hebrews is that they have preserved their religion and made it a power in the world, when throughout almost the whole of their history the social, political, and main religious forces of the world have been against them and against it. It was steadfast loyalty to their religious ideals that wrought this miracle and made them the religious benefactors of mankind.

It would seem from the first chapter of Daniel that the author was a vegetarian and a teetotaler, but the objection of the Hebrew boys to the king's meat and wine was not social, but religious. They would not defile themselves by partaking of what had been blessed by a pagan god or that had not been prepared according to Jewish custom. To eat meat from the king's table would be the same as to eat meat offered to idols. Still, it would be quite proper in this connection to comment on the beauty of a simple and temperate life. Daniel's refusal to forego the custom of daily prayer at the window open towards Jerusalem may be noted. But the main lesson of the story is the value or power of faith and loyalty, standing true to conviction, whatever the outward pressure.

Questions.

For what purpose were the four Hebrew boys in the palace of the king?

Why did they not want to eat meat from the king's table?

Did their simple fare prove good for both body and mind?

Why were Daniel's three friends put into the fiery furnace? And why were they not burned?

Can you tell the story of Daniel in the lions' den?

What order did the king give to his people when he found that Daniel was not hurt by the lions?

Application.

What does it mean to have faith in God? God, we say, is love; He is truth, beauty; He is the Life that is in all and through all things, working for good. And, if we believe that the good life is to be the victorious life,—that is to say, that the good is to be the master of the bad in us and in the world,—then we have faith in God. We have faith such as that in the heart of Daniel and his friends.

“When courage fails, and faith burns low,
And men are timid grown,
Hold fast thy loyalty, and know
That truth still moveth on.”

Why should we always be loyal to our faith? Can we ever grow to be true men and women if we are not true to what is highest and best in us and the life about us? Does loyalty to our religion mean that we think it is perfect? Does it not mean rather that we want to be true to the best we know to-day, that that best may be better still to-morrow? We certainly cannot improve our religion by denying it or by being careless and indifferent about it. It is only those who believe in what is to them the highest good with all the mind and heart and soul, and are ready to speak for it and work for it with all their might that make the world grow better from year to year. The king might put the three Hebrew boys in the fiery furnace, but he could not make them worship the golden image he had set up. Why? Because they had a higher thought of God, and they were going to be true to it. This is the spirit that made Israel great. It is the spirit that made Holland great when

Philip II. of Spain tried with force to make her accept a form of religion in which she did not believe. While all Europe expected to see her crushed out of existence, she rose in her might, and drove the tyrant's army from her land. It does not save people from death: it makes them glad to die in a noble cause.

" 'Tis faith in God, 'tis faith in man,
'Tis faith in truth and beauty,
In freedom's might, and reason's right,
And all-controlling duty."

XXXVI. An Unwilling Prophet.

(THE BOOK OF JONAH.)

Explanation.

Doubt of the Bible as the word of God generally begins with Jonah. It has probably made more sceptics than any other book ever written. The idea that a man could go tossing about the Mediterranean Sea three days and three nights inside a fish, singing a song of deliverance before he is delivered, and then be thrown out upon the dry land as well as ever, is too great a demand on the credence of the mind that thinks as it reads. Still more so is the idea that all the people and beasts of a great city should repent, fast, and put on sackcloth, and cry mightily to the Hebrew God at the preaching of a foreign prophet. Imagine Boston or Chicago becoming Mohammedan all at once at the preaching of a prophet of Allah. We are inclined to laugh at the man who should write such an absurd story; but, if we get his point of view, we may see that the laugh is on the reader instead of the writer.

Who the author was and when he wrote we do not know. He probably lived in the time of Ezra and Nehemiah or shortly after, and was not altogether persuaded of the wisdom of their purposes and methods. His book, at any rate, is a clever satire on the type of men they represented.

With the intense loyalty of the party contending for the exclusive worship of Israel's God was an intense narrowness,

an intense hatred not only of heathen religion, but of the heathen themselves and of all pertaining to them. This party insisted that their God was the God of the Jews only, that no other people should be allowed in His temple or to have part in His mercy; that His worshipers should not intermarry with the worshipers of other gods, but should come out and be separate from them in every possible way. If you read the book of Esther, you will see how savage and revengeful was this feeling of exclusiveness on the part of the Jews in respect to all other people. (See also Nehemiah xiii. 23-30.)

The author of the book of Jonah had reached a higher thought of God, and he thought that the best way to rebuke this bigotry was to hold it up to ridicule. To this end he takes an old-time prophet, of whom nothing is known but his name, and makes him the personification of it. God calls this prophet to go and preach in the great heathen city of Nineveh. What to his mind could be more absurd than this? He will do nothing of the kind: he will fly the country, get away from the presence of the Lord rather than disgrace himself by such a mission.

So he takes ship for Tarshish, a Phœnician province in Spain, exactly in the opposite direction to Nineveh. But his experience with the storm and the fish makes him see that God is outside of Judea as well as in it. Observe that the heathen sailors do all they can to save Jonah; and, when by casting lots it is determined that he is responsible for the storm, they pray his God to spare him and not hold them accountable for his death.

The next time God calls Jonah to go to Nineveh, he goes. The immediate repentance of the people is a sore trouble to him. But, what is worse still, God does not punish these heathen according to His promises. It has turned out just as he feared it would when he was first called to go to Nineveh,—the Lord repents of the evil He was going to do to it and the city is spared. The disgusted prophet cannot restrain his anger. Then by the type of the gourd the Lord tries to make Jonah see that this is as it should be.

In this last part of the story the author gives his answer

to a question often in the minds of those who thought themselves the chosen people of God. The leaders and teachers had said again and again that the Lord would punish and bring to naught these nations that were ever afflicting His people; but they continue in power and prosperity. Why is this? Why is not the word of God spoken by His prophets fulfilled? The answer of the book of Jonah is in its last verse. It is because God is merciful; and His mercy is to the heathen as well as to the Jew.

Such is the teaching of the parable. It is the same as that of Isaiah when he makes God say, "The strangers who join my people out of love for me I will not shut out, but will bring them to my holy mountain and make them glad in my house of prayer; for my house shall be called a house of prayer for all nations" (Isaiah lvi. 3-9). It is the same as that of Jesus in the parable of the Good Samaritan, and when he said, "Other sheep have I not of this fold"; and also as that of Peter, when he said, "Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons; but in every nation he that feareth Him and worketh righteousness is accepted with Him" (Acts. x. 34-35).

And, thus interpreted, the book of Jonah is one of the greatest books in either Testament.

Catholicity of spirit, broad-mindedness, true liberalism in religion, the wideness of God's mercy, are the themes our thoughts should dwell upon in this lesson.

Questions.

What did the Lord call Jonah to do?

For what place did Jonah take ship when he decided to go from the presence of the Lord?

What happened to him at sea?

What happened in Nineveh when he preached there?

What was his feeling about it?

How did the Lord try to show him that it was right to spare Nineveh?

Application.

Ought we to laugh at Jonah? Yes, the author of our story intended that we should laugh at him, only we should

remember that, when we laugh at him, we may be laughing at ourselves, though we know it not. It may be that there are those so much more liberal in thought and feeling than we are that our way of life seems as ridiculous to them as Jonah's does to us.

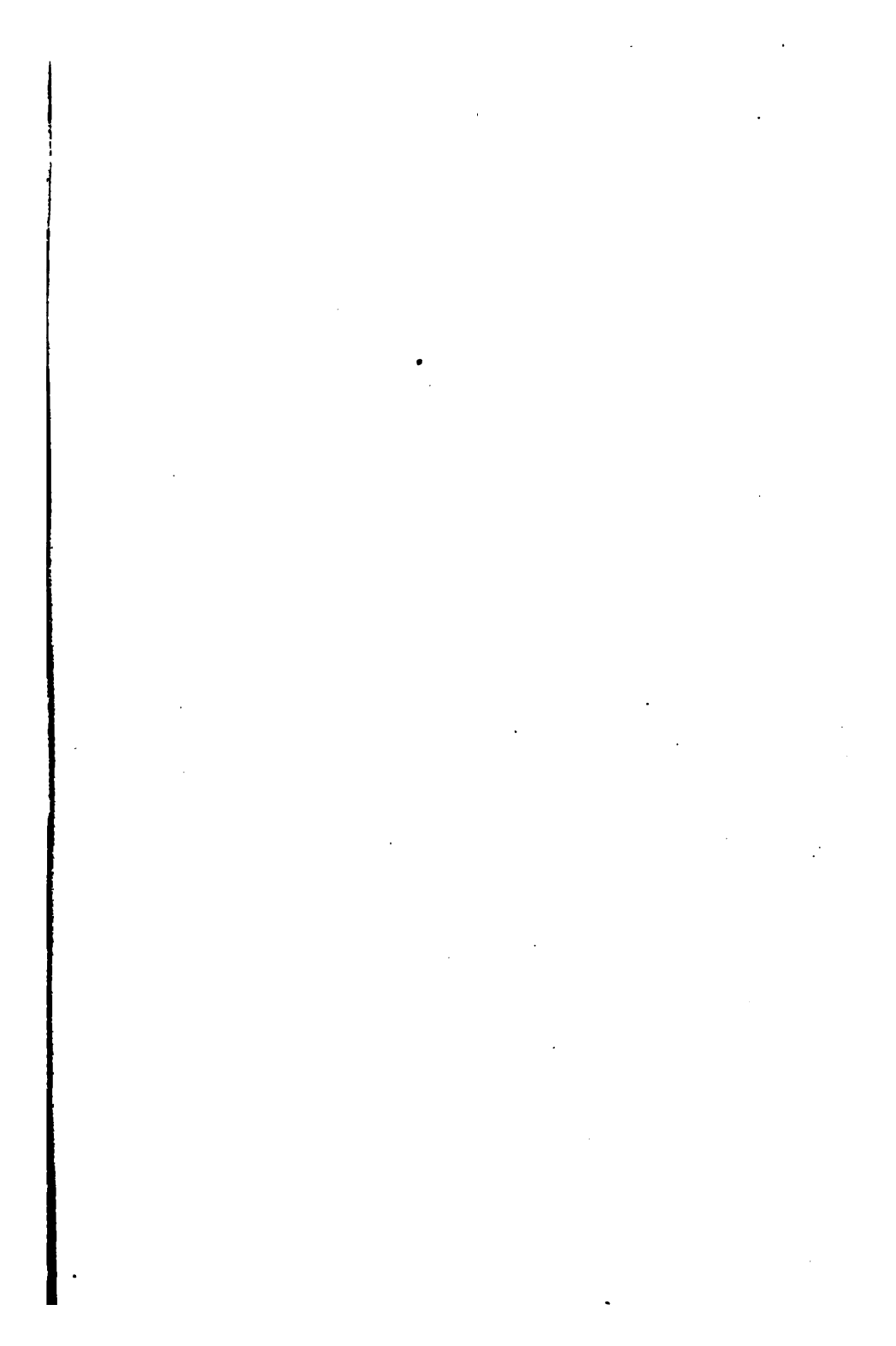
Do we ever try to run away from God? How is it when we try to hide our faults or pretend to be better than we are? What does it mean when we do not live up to our best thought and feeling, and try to get away from doing the things that we know we ought to do? How is it when we fail to tell what we think and believe when our word might give hope and cheer to others? How when we are false to our religious faith and principles?

What is it to be liberal in religion? Is it to be indifferent or careless in thought or practice? Solomon was liberal in this sense. He was ready to worship all the heathen gods about him; but this did not make him true, honest, or upright in life.

Are we jealous when we see that others have more or better things than we have? Are we angered because things do not turn out as we want them to? Are we ever sullen and gloomy, quarrelsome or peevish, because we cannot have our own way, even though a better way than ours be done? If so, wherein are we better than Jonah? Let us make sure that, when we laugh at him, we are not laughing at ourselves.

In all our thoughts of those who differ from us let us remember that

"There is a wideness in God's mercy
Like the wideness of the sea;
There is a kindness in His justice,
Which is more than liberty.
For the love of God is broader
Than the measure of man's mind,
And the heart of the Eternal
Is most wonderfully kind."



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